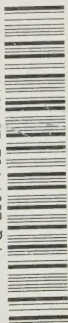




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OF
CELEBRATED WOMEN.

BY
C. A. SAINTE-BEUVE.

TRANSLATED FROM THE FRENCH BY H. W. PRESTON.

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P R E F A C E.

IN preparing for publication a translation of a few of M. Sainte-Beuve's celebrated essays, I can only hope that I have been able faithfully to transmit the author's *thought*. The peculiar felicities of his manner, the consummate finish of the original style, it were almost impossible to reproduce.

It is unnecessary to dwell upon M. Sainte-Beuve's supreme qualifications as a critic. We rise from the most careless perusal of his writings with the conviction that his is finer, more thorough, more scientific work, than is furnished us by the best even of English critics, Mr. Matthew Arnold, perhaps, excepted. With the academician, criticism is the serious exercise of a special and highly cultivated gift; not, as too often happens nearer home, a mere occasion for displaying the writer's acquirements, or promulgating his theories. The different series of Portraits are so many patient and accurate studies in human nature, — priceless contributions to a possible science

(5)

of character, rather than elaborate accounts of the way in which individual greatness may have moved the author's individual mind. Yet there is no affectation of impartiality, none of the ostentatious many-sidedness of the inferior critic. M. Sainte-Beuve expresses his personal likes and dislikes with an ease and freedom akin to the freedom of manner that accompanies the highest breeding. Of the men and women who come up before him for judgment, and whom he reads so clearly and classifies so ably, it is easy to decide towards whom his heart has warmed, and by whom he has been repelled. Hardly can Napoleon I. or M. de Talleyrand, for example, come within even telescopic range of our author but he fires off a stinging witticism. The marvel is, that his final estimate seems barely influenced by the accident of his predilections. Apart from the region of private preferences and antipathies, in a kind of serene seclusion, would seem to dwell that rare and unerring faculty, by virtue of which he weighs the perplexing claims of his fellow-beings, and dispassionately assigns them their relative rank in the scale of human greatness.

The possession and use of such a power is sufficiently remarkable where a man is passing judgment upon men. Where a man is passing judgment upon women it is little less than miraculous. The quiet fairness with which M. Sainte-Beuve estimates femi-

nine effort and achievement in letters, as contrasted alike with the indulgent praise and the considerate blame, which are the best they ordinarily receive, is, to a woman at least, absolutely affecting. Doubtless, even here it is plain that M. Sainte-Beuve has preferences, and what those preferences are. He treats all women nobly and fairly. He exalts their mission, he hails their graver experiments, but, personally, he worships at the old shrine. To him there is a feminine quality far transcending, in power and charm, mere genius; or even, let us say, saintship,—although he values the latter highly,—and that quality is wealth of the emotional nature; in short, the capacity for passion. His loyalty is for the woman whose triumphs have been in the realms of feeling. The Queen of Hearts is the queen of all her sex to him. To set forth her personal graces, he employs all the pomp of his eloquence; for her errors he has a tender charity; for her repentance a passionate sympathy; for her literary productions, if any, a tearful appreciation. All this is delicately and almost amusingly indicated in the ingenious motto to the French edition of the *Portraits de Femmes*.¹

And since it may seem to some of those who are

¹ Avez vous donc été femme, monsieur, pour pretendre ainsi nous connaître ?

Non, madame; je ne suis pas le divin Tirésias; je ne suis qu'un humble mortel qui vous a beaucoup aimées.

familiar with the original, as if the nine essays of which this volume consists had been rather arbitrarily chosen, and as if they failed fairly to represent the distinguished essayist's real view, I shall venture to indicate the motives which guided that choice, by recording here my own conviction that his view was more applicable to woman in the past, than it ever can be to woman in the future. Times have changed since even these incomparable essays were written, and the needs of the human race have yearly grown more pressing. There seems some reason to believe that, as its struggle with evil becomes more desperate, the reserves of that race will have to be called into action, and that a privileged class will not much longer be tolerated in any order. Indications are not wanting that woman's quiet days of political, and, to some extent, moral irresponsibility, are over,—that the sweet *insouciance* with which she used to be expected to regard all the sterner problems of life and duty, is as surely a grace of the past as classical patriotism or mediæval chivalry; that her aim must henceforth be to help rather than to please, and that however tenaciously she may cling to the traditions of her "sphere," she will not much longer be able to maintain the lily's passive state in the field of the world. The thought of such a change is, doubtless, disagreeable to most women, and repudiated by most men; but there are moments when it appears inevita-

ble, and the restless and repeated demands of the innovating minority in either sex would seem, judging by experience, to indicate that the question must come up for decision at no distant day. Not many women, I suppose, desire the suffrage. Fewer still are, strictly speaking, fit for it; but many have been of late impelled to inquire how they would repair their wretched ignorance of their country's state and needs, if, amid the swift changes of the present, the unwelcome responsibility were suddenly thrust upon them.

On more than one occasion M. Sainte-Beuve himself betrays his presentiment of a new order of things. When, in his noble summing up of the life and character of Mme. Roland, he declares his hope that marriages may one day come to be regulated more in accordance with the real fitness of things than now, and to imply an intellectual union; when he speaks of the austere training which the wise mother of one of his heroines gave her daughters in view of altered social conditions, and shows how another was sobered by the task of training men for *our painful modern society*, he is evidently looking towards a grave and dubious future. And in all modern literature, I know of no pages more solemn, more searching, more truly tonic to an earnest feminine mind, than are to be found in the essays on Mme. Guizot and Mme. de Rémusat, and some portions of the essay on Mme. de Staël.

As I leave with the public this inadequate translation of a unique and most suggestive book, I am conscious of two distinct desires with regard to its fate; — on the one hand, that, as read by those of my countrywomen whose position and means give them authority in social matters, it may suggest some method of infusing into our American society — which is too generally either frigid or extremely frivolous — a little of the *spirituel* grace of the French *salon*; on the other, that its graver biographies may serve to remind some of the more gifted among the “anxious and aimless” sisterhood, of the possibility of sober and useful literary careers, which they may enter easily by abjuring vanity, and paying the ennobling fee of patient thought and conscientious study.

HARRIET W. PRESTON.

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PORTRAITS

OF CELEBRATED WOMEN.

I.

MADAME DE SÉVIGNÉ.

THE critics of these latter days, more especially the foreigners, who have judged most severely our two literary centuries, have been unanimous in their recognition of the fact that the dominant spirit of those centuries — that of which they return us a thousand varying reflections; that which adorned and glorified them most — was a genius for conversation and society; a knowledge of the world and of men; a lively and acute appreciation both of the becoming and the absurd; a curious delicacy of sentiment, grace, piquancy, and finished politeness of speech. And, with the reservations that all will make, and excepting two or three names like those of Bossuet and Montesquieu, such was, indeed, up to about 1789, the peculiar character, the distinguishing trait, of the French among the other literatures of Europe. This distinction, with which we

have been almost reproached as a nation, is a fine and suggestive one to him who can comprehend and interpret it.

At the beginning of the seventeenth century our civilization, and hence our language and our literature, were utterly unripe and insecure. Europe, on issuing from her religious troubles through the phases of the thirty years' war, gave painful birth to a new political order. In the interior of France the traces of civil discord were wearing away. At the court, a few *salons*, a few select circles of wits, were already in fashion; but nothing great or original had sprung from them as yet, and people fed to satiety on Spanish romances and Italian sonnets and pastorals. It was not until after Richelieu and the Fronde, in the days of the queen-mother and Mazarin, that suddenly from the midst of the fêtes of Saint-Mandé and of Vaux, from the saloons of the Hôtel de Rambouillet¹ or the ante-chambers of the youthful king, there issued, as if by a miracle, three preëminent minds, — three geniuses diversely endowed, but gifted, all of them, with unaffected purity of taste, perfect simplicity, and rare fertility, — instinct with grace and refinement, and destined to inaugurate an illustrious era in which they remain unsurpassed. Molière, La Fontaine, and Mme. de Sévigné belong to the literary generation preceding that of which Racine and Boileau

¹ In his *Mémoire pour servir à l'Histoire de la Société polie* (1835), M. Rœderer has traced out and unravelled all that concerns the history of the Hôtel de Rambouillet in particular, with a fond minuteness which in no degree impairs, as we think, either the accuracy or the fascination of his book. It is, however, absolutely necessary that the proper names and dates should be more correctly printed.

were the chiefs, and are distinguished from these last by sundry traits peculiar alike to the nature of their genius and the date of their advent. We feel that, by virtue of their position and their turn of mind, they belong far more to the France before Louis XIV., and the old French spirit and language; that they are more intimately associated with it by their education and their reading, and that if they are less thoroughly appreciated by foreigners than some subsequent writers, the fact is owing to that precisely which is most individual, most indefinable, and most charming to ourselves in their accent and manner. While, therefore, we are now endeavoring, and justly, to review and revise many of the decisions delivered twenty years since by the *Athenæum* critics, — while we declare pitiless war on many a superficial reputation, — we cannot, on the other hand, too deeply venerate or too earnestly uphold those immortal writers, who first gave to French literature its original character, and have thus far insured it a unique physiognomy among the literatures of other lands. From the spectacle of life — the lively play of human caprices, and the vices and follies of men — Molière extracted the grandest and most powerful poetry that can be conceived. La Fontaine and Mme. de Sévigné, upon a narrower stage, displayed, in their several ways, an equally fine and just appreciation of the life and the events of their day, — La Fontaine being the closer to nature, and Mme. de Sévigné the more versed in society; and this exquisite feeling they have expressed so vividly in their writings, that they easily take a rank equal or scarcely inferior to that of their illustrious contemporary. We propose at present to speak only of Mme. de Sévigné. It may seem as if

nothing remained to be said on the subject, and its details are certainly well nigh exhausted ; but, in our opinion, she has until now been regarded too much as an isolated figure, — as was long the case with La Fontaine, whom she strongly resembles. At this distance of time, therefore, when the complete outline of the society whose most brilliant phase she represents is clearly presented to our view, it becomes easier, and at the same time more needful than ever, for us to assign to Mme. de Sévigné her relative rank and importance. Doubtless it is the failure to make these observations, and to take note of the difference in times, which has seemed to render certain of our distinguished contemporaries inclined to judge with as much flippancy as severity one of the most delightful geniuses that ever lived. We shall be happy if our article help to dissipate a few of these unjust prejudices.

The excesses of the regency have been strongly stigmatized ; but before the regency of Philip of Orleans there was another equally dissolute, equally licentious, and rendered yet more atrocious by its admixture of cruelty — a kind of hideous transition from the vices of Henry III. to those of Louis XV. The corruptions of the League, which had smouldered under Henry IV. and Richelieu, revived again as soon as the pressure was removed. Debauchery was every whit as monstrous at that period as it had been in the days of the *mignons*, and afterwards became in the days of the *roués* ; but two things especially assimilate this period to the sixteenth, and distinguish it from the eighteenth, century. They are the habit of assassination and poisoning, — Italian practices which we owed to the Medici, — and a senseless rage for duelling, — the heri-

tage of our civil wars. Such, to the impartial reader, appears the regency of Anne of Austria. Such was the dark and bloody background on which was sketched, one fine morning, the Fronde, which the world has agreed to denominate an armed jest. The conduct of the women of that day most distinguished by birth, beauty, and talent seems fabulous. We must believe that the historians have slandered them. But as any excess always produces its opposite, the few who escaped corruption plunged into sentimental metaphysics and became *précieuses*, and hence the Hôtel de Rambouillet.¹ This was the asylum of good manners in the midst of high society. Good taste also found a place there, for thence issued Mme. de Sévigné.

Mlle. Marie de Rabutin Chantal was born in 1626. She was the daughter of the Baron de Chantal, an

¹ Much has been written of late about the Hôtel de Rambouillet. There have been four or five different notices or brief histories of it since Rœderer. It seems to me there is a general endeavor to fix its close a little too early. It was in full bloom and at the height of its splendor at the beginning of the regency — 1643–1648. (The *Précieuses* were the ladies who met at the Hôtel de Rambouillet, and undertook, under the lead of the *Marquise*, to reform the licentious manners, and more especially the coarse language, prevalent at the time. They were virtuous, refined, and in many cases learned women, and did great service. But when after a time they became affected and pedantic, Molière ridiculed them in one of his most famous comedies. *Les Précieuse Ridicules* was first played on the 18th of November, 1659, and was followed by many imitations. It was the first of Molière's plays ever printed; and so influential was the clique in question that he felt obliged to declare in his preface that his object had been to attack, not the real *précieuses*, but their spurious imitators.) — TR.

incorrigible duellist, who left the Lord's table one Easter day in order to act as second to the famous Count de Bouteville. Brought up by her uncle, the excellent Abbé de Coulanges, she early received a solid education, and acquired, under the auspices of Chapelain and Ménage, Latin, Italian, and Spanish.¹ At the age of eighteen she married the Marquis de Sévigné, a man quite unworthy of her, who, after treating her with extreme neglect, was killed in a duel in 1651. Mme. de Sévigné, left free at so early an age with a son and a daughter, did not dream of a second marriage. She was fond even to folly of her children, her daughter especially. To the other passions she remained a stranger. She was a smiling blonde, — not in the least voluptuous, but very playful and animated. The lightnings of her intellect flashed and faded in her changeful eyes, and, as she herself said, in her *veined eyelids*. She became a *précieuse*. She was beloved, flattered, and courted in the world.² She scattered all around her the seeds of unhappy passions, whereof she took none too

¹ The most daring and original talents fail of effect without a preparatory discipline — a thorough course of rhetoric. Mme. de Sévigné received hers from Ménage and Chapelain.

² Mme. de La Fayette wrote to her, "Your presence increases gayety, and gayety in your surroundings increases your own beauty; for joy is the true element of your soul, and unhappiness more alien to you than to any other person in the world." Mme. de Sévigné had *humor* only in the sense that she was *humorous*. Hers was a pleasant humor, tinged and varied each instant by a most lively imagination. These flashes, this splendor of color, veil in a measure her sensibility, — which, even in moments of sorrow, cannot help assuming a graceful guise. One must learn to see her beneath it. There was a grain of Mme. Cornuel in Mme. de Sévigné.

much heed, and magnanimously kept as friends those whom she did not want for lovers. Her cousin Bussy, her master Ménage, the Prince de Conti, brother of the great Condé, and the superintendent Fouquet, wasted their sighs about her; but she remained unswervingly faithful to the latter in his disgrace, and when she tells the story of the superintendent's trial to M. de Pomponne, it is impossible not to remark the tenderness with which she speaks of "our dear unfortunate." Still young herself, and unaffectedly beautiful, she took her stand in the world on her love for her daughter, and desired no happiness save that of bringing her out and seeing her shine.¹ From the year 1663 Mlle. de Sévigné figured in the brilliant ballets of Versailles, and Benserade, the official poet, who held the place at court assumed by Racine and Boileau after 1672, composed more than one madrigal in honor of that *nymph* and *shepherdess* whom an idolatrous mother called *the fairest daughter in France*. In 1669 M. de Grignan obtained the hand of the latter, and six months later he bore her off to

¹ We have a charming portrait of Mme. de Sévigné in her youth, by the Abbé Arnould. Brilliant indeed must have been her coloring to have warmed for a moment the style of the worthy abbé, who seems not to have had all the literary talent of his family. "It was on this journey," he says, in his *Memoirs*, "in the year 1657, that M. de Sévigné introduced me to his niece, the celebrated Marquise de Sévigné. I seem to see her yet, as she appeared the first time I had that honor, stepping into the back of her open carriage with her son and daughter, — the three reminding one of the representations by the poets of Latona between the young Apollo and Diana, so lovely were the mother and her children." This is worth while! A wit, a beauty, a grace in broad daylight and in an open carriage, and resplendent between two beautiful children!

Provence, where he was commanding as lieutenant-general, in the absence of M. de Vendôme. Henceforth, separated from her daughter, whom she only saw at long and irregular intervals, Mme. de Sévigné sought consolation for her regrets in a constant correspondence, which continued till her death in 1696, and which comprises a period of twenty-five years, with the exception of a few gaps marking the temporary reunions of the mother and daughter. Previous to the separation of 1671, we have only a very few letters addressed by Mme. de Sévigné to her cousin Bussy, and a few to M. de Pomponne on the subject of Fouquet's trial. We date from this period, therefore, our minute knowledge of her private life and habits—the books she read, and the most trivial incidents of the society in which she lived and of which she was the soul.

And, in the first place, we learn from the earliest pages of the correspondence, that we are in a very different world from that of the Fronde and the regency, and we recognize the fact that French society, so called, has at length taken shape. No doubt,—and in the absence of the memoirs of the time, the anecdotes told by Mme. de Sévigné herself would prove it,—no doubt frightful irregularities and gross orgies are still practised among that young *noblesse* upon whom Louis XIV. imposes, as the price of his favor, dignity, courtesy, and elegance. Doubtless beneath the superficial brilliancy and tournament gilding, there is vice enough to overflow afresh under another regency, especially after the bigotry of the close of this reign shall have caused it to ferment. But the proprieties at least are observed, and public opinion is beginning to brand whatever is ignoble or savors of gross debauchery. Moreover, as

riot and brutality become less outrageous, purity and talent grow less self-conscious. To be a *précieuse* has ceased to be fashionable. People remember with a smile that they were so once, but they are so no longer. They do not, as, of old, maintain interminable discussions on the sonnets of *Job* or *Urania*, the leading card or the Roman character; but they converse — they relate the court news, and reminiscences of the siege of Paris or the war of Guyenne. Cardinal de Retz tells the tale of his travels, M. de la Rochefoucauld moralizes, Mme. de La Fayette makes sentimental reflections, and Mme. de Sévigné interrupts them to repeat a witticism of her daughter's, or a mischievous trick of her son's, or a case of absence of mind on the part of the excellent d'Hacqueville or M. de Brancas. We in 1829, with our habits of positive occupation, can scarcely form a just conception of that life of leisure and chit-chat. The world moves so swiftly in our time, so many novelties are introduced upon the stage, that we must be constantly on the alert if we would catch and comprehend them all. Our days are passed in study, our evenings in grave conversation. Of a mere interchange of conversational amenities — of *causeries* — we have little or nothing. The aristocratic society of our own day, which has most carefully preserved the idle habits of the past two centuries, seems to have done so only on condition of remaining a stranger to the customs and ideas of the present.¹ But at the time of which we

¹ Since these pages were written, I have frequently had occasion to remark, quietly, but with great satisfaction, that the ruin of the spirit of conversation in France has been slightly exaggerated. Doubtless the general aspect of society is changed, but there are fine remnants — nooks where the autumn lingers.

speak, this sort of life was rather favorable than adverse to the observation of literary, religious, or political movements. You had but to cast a sidelong glance upon them now and then, — you needed not to stir from your chair, — and the rest of the time you might devote yourself to your tastes and your friends. Moreover, conversation had not yet become, as it did in the eighteenth century in the *salons* where Fontenelle presided, an occupation, a business, an affectation. It did not require close attention, and a geometrical, philosophical, or sentimental scaffolding had not become indispensable; but people talked of themselves, of others, of little or nothing. “Conversations,” says Mme. de Sévigné, “were infinite.” “After dinner,” she somewhere writes to her daughter, “we went out into the loveliest woods in the world and talked. We remained until nearly six o’clock, conversing on a great variety of subjects, in a manner so genial, so gentle, so agreeable, so flattering both to you and me, that I am overcome by the remembrance.”¹ Amid a movement of society thus easy and simple, capricious, yet animated and graceful, a visit, or the reception of a letter, no matter how insignificant, was an event from which people derived pleasure, and

They give one the peculiar pleasure of a reproduction, almost that of a mystery.

¹ Mlle. de Montpensier, who was of the same age as Mme. de Sévigné, but who possessed rather less power of adaptation than the latter, writing, in 1660, to Mme. de Motteville, on her ideal of a retired life, requires *heroes* and *heroines* of different sorts. “We should need,” she says, “all kinds of persons, able to talk of all kinds of things, which, according to your taste and mine, is the greatest pleasure in life, and, in my opinion, almost the only one.”

into which they entered with enthusiasm. The slightest circumstances became important by their manner and their form. Carelessly and unconsciously men were introducing art into life. Take for instance the visit of Mme. de Chaulnes to the Rocks. It has been often said that Mme. de Sévigné took peculiar pains with her letters, — that she wrote them with a thought, if not of posterity, at least of the contemporary world, whose suffrage she desired to win. This is false. The days of Voiture and Balzac were still distant. She generally wrote rapidly, and as many items as possible; and, if time pressed, she hardly read over what she had written. “The truth is,” she says, “that among friends, we must give our pens free course. Mine has always the reins upon its neck.” Still there are days when she has more leisure, and is more in the mood; and then, very naturally, she considers, she arranges, she composes almost as carefully as La Fontaine for one of his fables. Witness the letter to M. de Coulanges on Mademoiselle’s marriage, and especially the one about that poor Picard,¹ who was dismissed because he would not make hay. Letters of this sort, brilliant and artistically constructed, which did not contain too many little secrets or scandals, made a noise in society, and everybody wanted to read them. “I must not forget what happened this morning,” writes Mme. de Coulanges to

¹ Mme. de Sévigné’s summary dismissal from her service of the faithful but fastidious old Picard, because he refused to assist in cutting the grass on the lawns of the Rocks, preparatory to a visit from the Duchess de Chaulnes, is described in Letter 186 of M. Monmerqué’s edition of her correspondence, and also in a very amusing letter to M. de Coulanges, No. 187 of the same edition. — Tr.

her friend. "I was told that a footman of Mme. de Thianges was here, and I ordered him in. His errand was this: 'Madame, I come from Mme. de Thianges, who begs you will send her Mme. de Sévigné's letter about the *horse* and the one about the *meadow*.' I told the servant that I would take them myself to his mistress, and so got rid of him. So, you see, your letters are as celebrated as they deserve to be, and you are like your letters." Correspondence, like conversation, was a very important matter in those days, but there was no composition about either. Only people gave themselves up to these things, heart and soul. Mme. de Sévigné is always complimenting her daughter on her letters. "You have some ideas and passages that are incomparable." And then she tells how she reads aloud certain choice fragments to people who are worthy of them. "Sometimes, too, I give a morsel to Mme. de Villars; but she is most interested in the endearments which bring tears to her eyes."

But however men may have disputed the simplicity of Mme. de Sévigné's letters, no one has ever denied the sincerity of her love for her daughter; and that very fact sometimes makes us forget the times in which she lived, and how often, in such a life of luxury and sloth, passions resemble whims, and follies become passions. She idolized her daughter, and early took her stand in the world on that idolatry. Arnault d'Andilly called her, in this respect, a "pretty pagan." Separation only increased her devotion. She could scarcely think of anything else. The inquiries and compliments of those whom she met, all led her back to the same point. This dear and well nigh sole affection of her heart became, at length, a kind of *way* of hers, which

was just as necessary to her as her fan. Otherwise Mme. de Sévigné was perfectly sincere and open — a foe to all false seeming; and she was one of the first women who ever deserved to be called a *genuine* person. She would have invented this expression for her daughter, if M. de la Rochefoucauld had not already hit upon it for Mme. de La Fayette. She liked, at least, to apply it to those whom she loved. After carefully analyzing, and turning over for the hundredth time, this inexhaustible natural affection, we revert to the opinion and the explanation of it offered by M. de Pomponne. “So it seems to you that Mme. de Sévigné loves Mme. de Grignan passionately. Do you know what is on the face of the card? Shall I tell you? Why this,—that *she loves her passionately!*” It would indeed be most ungrateful to quarrel with Mme. de Sévigné for this innocent and lawful passion, to which we owe the privilege of following this most *spirituelle* of women step by step through twenty-six years of the most charming period of the most charming French society.¹

La Fontaine, the painter of fields and animals, was by no means ignorant of society, and often described it with archness and delicacy. Mme. de Sévigné, in her turn, was very fond of the fields. She used to

¹ M. Walckenaer, in his Memoirs of Mme. de Sévigné, well remarks that she, in whom the maternal sentiment attained so high a development, had had no time for the filial sentiment, having been left an orphan at a very early age. All the passion of her heart was held in reserve, as it were, and descended to her daughter. A widow while still in the freshness of youth, she seems never to have loved as a lover. What an accumulated treasure of affection! and her daughter inherited it all with interest.

make long visits with the Abbé de Coulanges at Livry, or at her estate of the Rocks, in Brittany. It is curious to observe under what aspects she beheld and depicted nature. In the first place, we perceive that, like our excellent fabulist, she had early read *l'Astrée*, and dreamed in her youth beneath the shady mythologies of Vaux and Saint-Mandé. She loves to walk *by the beams of the fair mistress of Endymion*, and to pass hours *alone with the hamadryads*. Her trees are adorned with ingenious mottoes and inscriptions, like those in the landscapes of the *Pastor Fido* and *Aminta* — “*Bella cosa far niente*,” says one of my trees, and another replies, “*Amor odit inertes*.” One knows not which to heed.” And again, “As for our inscriptions, they are not in the least injured. I often visit them. Their number even increases, and two neighboring trees sometimes make the two contradictory remarks — ‘*La lontananza ogni gran piaga salda*,’ and ‘*Piaga d’amor non si sana mai*.’ There are five or six of them disputing thus.” These slightly insipid reminiscences of pastorals and romances are natural to her pen, and set off most agreeably all the new and fresh delineation which belongs to her alone. “I have come here [to Livry] to finish the pleasant weather, and say good by to the leaves. They still cling to the trees, but have changed color; instead of being green they are golden, and in so many different shades that they make a rich and splendid gold brocade, which we should like better than verdure, were it not worn only for a change.” And when she is at the Rocks, “I should be happy in these woods if I could but find here a singing leaf. What a beautiful thing that would be! — a singing leaf.” And how she paints for us the

"*triumph of the May*, — when the nightingale, the cuckoo, and the linnet open the spring-time in our forests," — and makes us feel, and almost touch, those "fine, *crystalline* days of autumn which are no longer warm, and not yet cold." When her son, in order to meet his foolish expenses, causes the ancient woods of Buron to be felled, she is moved to mourning for all the fugitive dryads and dispossessed sylvans. Ronsard did not deplore more eloquently the fall of the forest of Gastine, nor M. de Chateaubriand that of his ancestral woods.

But though we so often see her in a gay and sportive mood, we should be wrong to conclude that Mme. de Sévigné was frivolous or wanting in sensibility. She was serious, and even sad, especially when in the country, and reverie held a large place in her life. Still we must distinguish: she did not dream beneath the dense and melancholy shade of her long avenues in the style of Delphine and the enamoured mistress of Oswald. That species of reverie was not yet invented.¹ '93 was necessary before Mme. de Staël could write her admirable book on the Influence of the Passions upon happiness. Up to that time reverie was a far easier, simpler, more individual thing, and one of which less heed was taken. It was thinking of a daughter away in Provence, or of a son in Candia or with the king's army, or of dead or distant friends. It was to say, "As for my life, you know it. I spend it with five or six friends whose society is pleasant to me, and in the performance of a thousand necessary duties — no light

¹ "The joyousness of a spirit is an index of its power," wrote Ninon at that time to Saint-Evremond.

affair. But what troubles me is that nothing is accomplished day by day, — and life is made up of days, — and we grow old and we die. This, I think, is very sad.” The precise and formal religion by which people ruled their lives went far, in those times, towards restraining that libertinism of sentiment and imagination which since then has known no bounds. Mme. de Sévigné was extremely distrustful of herself about those thoughts which need to be *shurred*. She desires especially that morality may be Christian, and more than once rallies her daughter on being tainted with Cartesianism.¹

For herself, amid the chances of life she bows her head and takes refuge in a kind of providential fatalism, inspired by her connection with Port Royal and her readings of Nicole and Saint Augustine. This pious and resigned temper grows with her years, without altering in the least the serenity of her disposition. It communicates to her language a greater intellectual strength and a more solemn pathos. There is one letter in particular, addressed to M. de Coulanges on the death of the minister Louvois, in which she rises to the

¹ There has been a great deal of discussion about the merits of Mme. de Grignan, and her mother has somewhat injured her in our eyes by praising her extravagantly. It is a very embarrassing part to play before indifferent people — that of being the object of so much love. The son, who was something of a rake, strikes us as much more lovable. It is not difficult, as I think, to conceive that the sense and sprightliness which were so agreeably mingled in Mme. de Sévigné, were disjoined and divided between her children. The son had grace, but was not particularly reasonable or reliable. The daughter had intellect, but there was a hardness about her. Her reason was not sufficiently tempered to be piquant and fascinating.

sublimity of Bossuet, — as she had elsewhere and at other times attained the comic powers of Molière.

M. de Saint-Surin, in his valuable works on Mme. de Sévigné, has omitted no occasion of comparing her with Mme. de Staël, and always to the disadvantage of that celebrated woman. We, too, think that they may be contrasted with interest and profit, but without detriment to either. Mme. de Staël represents an entirely new order of society; Mme. de Sévigné an order that has passed away.

Hence arise prodigious differences, which we are at first tempted to refer solely to the difference in natural turn of mind. Yet, while we do not pretend to deny the profound original dissimilarity of these two souls, of which the one knew none but a mother's love, while the other experienced every human passion, even the most generous and manly, we perceive in them, on close inspection, many common qualities and weaknesses, whose diverse development is due only to the diversity of their times. What a natural airy grace, what pages dazzling with pure intellect, we find in Mme. de Staël, when sentiment does not interfere, and politics and philosophy are allowed to sleep! On the other hand, does Mme. de Sévigné never rise to philosophical dissertation? What would be the use, else, of having the *Essais de Morale*, the Christian Socrates, and Saint Augustine for one's daily fare? for this woman, who has been held frivolous, read everything, and read well. "It gives," she used to say, "dull colors to the mind to have no taste for solid reading." She studied Rabelais and the History of Variations, Montaigne and Pascal, the Cleopatra and Quintilian, Saint John Chrysostom and Tacitus, and Virgil; "not translated, but in

all the majesty of the Latin and the Italian." In rainy weather she read a folio in twelve days. During Lent it was her delight to plunge into Bourdaloue. Her conduct towards Fonquet suggests the self-devotion of which she might have been capable in revolutionary times. If she appears slightly vain-glorious when the king dances with her of an evening, or compliments her after the performance of Esther at Saint-Cyr, what other woman would have been more philosophical in her place? Are we not told that even Mme. de Staël laid herself out to obtain a word or a glance from the conqueror of Egypt and Italy? Surely a woman who had associated in her youth with Menages, Goleaux, and Benserades, and defended herself alike against their sharpness and their silliness by the mere force of her good sense, — who depicts with evident enjoyment the ultra refinement and affected fascinations of the Saint-Eyremonds and the Bussys, — a woman who, though an admiring friend of Mlle. de Soudery and Mme. de Maintenon, holds herself equally aloof from the romantic sentimentalism of the one and the somewhat overstrained prudery of the other, — who, though connected with the Port-Royalists, and brought up on the works of those gentlemen, does none the less esteem Montaigne and quote Rabelais, — who wishes no inscription on what she calls her convent, except "Sacred liberty," or "Do what thou wilt," — such a woman is free to jest and be gay, "sneer over her thoughts," and take things on their familiar and amusing side, for she gives proof of profound energy and of an originality of mind exceedingly rare.

There is a single case in which we cannot help regretting that Mme. de Sévigné should have yielded to

her habit of sarcasm and levity, where we absolutely refuse to enter into her mirth, and where, after a careful search for extenuating circumstances, we can scarcely pardon her. It is when she describes so gayly to her daughter the revolt of the peasants in Lower Brittany, and the horrible severities by which it was suppressed. As long as she confines herself to laughing at the Estates, at the country gentlemen with their obstreperous merry-makings, their enthusiasm for "voting every thing between twelve and one o'clock," and all the other absurdities of the Breton "neighbor" after dinner, — it is very well. This is sound and legitimate pleasantry, and recalls at times the touch of Molière. But from the moment when there were little trenches in Brittany, and a *stony-colic* at Rennes, — that is, when the governor, M. de Chaulnes, thinking to disperse the people by his presence, was driven back to his house by a shower of stones; from the moment when M. de Forbin arrives with six thousand soldiers against the mutineers, and when the poor devils, as soon as ever they perceive the royal troops in the distance, scatter about the fields and fall upon their knees, crying, *Meû culpâ* (which is all the *French* they know); when, for the punishment of Rennes, the parliament is transferred to Vannes, and twenty-five or thirty men are taken and hung *at random*; when they hunt down and banish the denizens of a whole long street, women in childbed, old men, children, — forbidding them to collect again on pain of death; when they break men on the wheel and quarter them, and, by dint of so breaking and quartering, come to relax their severity and try hanging; in the midst of all the horrors practised upon these innocent or mis-

guided wretches, it is painful to see Mme. de Sévigné enjoying herself almost as much as ever. We want her to show a bitter, burning, generous indignation; especially would we have her strike out of her letters passages like this: "The insurgents of Rennes have made their escape long ago; so the innocent must suffer for the guilty. I shall not complain, however, provided the four thousand soldiers, who are stationed at Rennes under MM. de Forbin and de Vins, do not hinder me from rambling in my woods, which are marvellously lofty and beautiful;" — and elsewhere, "They have captured sixty bourgeois, and to-morrow they will commence hanging. This province is a fine example to the others, and should teach them above all things to respect their governors and governesses, and never to tell them of their wrongs, nor throw stones into their gardens;" — and finally, "You are very factious on the subject of our wrongs, but we are no longer on the rack. One day in eight suffices for the purposes of justice; and as for the hanging, it is quite refreshing." The Duke de Chaulnes, who had instigated all these deeds of vengeance because the people threw stones into his garden, and plied him with injurious epithets, the mildest and most familiar of which was "great pig," is not lowered one atom in Mme. de Sévigné's esteem. She and Mme. de Grignan persist in calling him "our good duke;" and furthermore, when he is appointed ambassador to Rome, and quits his country, he leaves all Brittany in mourning. Assuredly, here is matter for considerable reflection on the manners and civilization of the *grand siècle*, which our readers will readily supply. Our only regret is, that on this occasion the heart of Mme. de Sévigné had not

risen higher above the prejudices of her time. She was capable of it, for her kindness equalled her beauty and her grace. It comes in course, now and then, for her to recommend a galley-slave to the notice of M. de Vivonne or M. de Grignan. The most interesting of her protégés is certainly a gentleman of Provence, whose name has not been preserved. "This poor creature," she says, "was attached to M. Fouquet, and convicted of trying to convey a letter to Mme. Fouquet from her husband, whereupon he is sentenced to the galleys for five years. The thing is slightly extraordinary. He is, as you know, one of the most honorable men alive, and as fit for the galleys as he is to eat the moon."

The style of Mme. de Sévigné has been so often and so appreciatively judged, analyzed, and extolled, that it would be difficult, to-day, to pronounce a eulogium at once novel and suitable; and on the other hand, we are by no means disposed to revive hackneyed cavils and criticisms. A single general observation will suffice: it is, that the elevated and beautiful styles of the age of Louis XIV. are to be considered with reference to two different processes, two contrary fashions. Malherbe and Balzac laid the foundation in our literature of the scholarly, chastened, polished, and elaborate style, in the infancy of which the expression of thought is attained by slow degrees,—through tentation and erasure. This is the style which Boileau recommends on all occasions. He would have a work remodelled twenty times, polished and repolished forever. He boasts of having learned from Racine the laborious manufacture of easy verse. Racine is, in fact, the most perfect model of this style in poetry. Fléchier was less

happy in his prose. But, side by side with this species of writing, always slightly uniform and academic, there is another and very different style, free, capricious, mobile, without traditional method, and thoroughly adaptable to the diversities of talent and genius. Montaigne and Regnier had already produced admirable specimens of it, and Queen Margaret a charming one in her memoirs—the work of a few afternoons. It is a style broad, careless, rich, which follows the flow of the thought—a direct, *impulsive* style, to speak after the manner of Montaigne himself. It is the style of La Fontaine and Molière, Fénelon and Bossuet, the Duke de Saint-Simon and Mme. de Sévigné. The latter excels in it. Her pen runs wild, — “with reins on neck,” — and as she goes she scatters colors, comparisons, and images in abundance, and diffuses an atmosphere of intellect and sentiment. She thus takes rank, involuntarily and unconsciously, with the first writers in our language.

“The sole artifice of which I should dare suspect Mme. de Sévigné,” says Mme. Necker, “is the frequent use of general, and therefore somewhat vague expressions, which, as employed by her, come to resemble those floating garments whose shape a skilful hand can change at will.” The comparison is ingenious, but there is no need of seeing an author’s trick in the prevailing manner of the day. Before being precisely adjusted to different species of ideas, language is flung around thought with an amplitude which lends a singular ease and grace. But when once the era of analysis has passed over a language, and it has been pruned and elaborated for special use, this indefinable charm is lost. It would be well were it possible to regain it when the days of artifice really come.

And now, if in the preceding pages we shall seem, to certain captious spirits, to have carried to an extreme our admiration for Mme. de Sévigné, may we not be allowed to ask of such one question — “Have you ever read her?” And by reading we mean not to run hastily over a selection from her letters, not to confine one’s self to the two or three that have attained a classic fame, — the letters, for instance, on the marriage of Mademoiselle, and on the deaths of Vatel, de Turenne, and Mme. de Longueville, — but to take up and read in course the ten volumes of her correspondence (and we would especially recommend the edition of MM. de Monmerqué and Saint-Surin), to follow out, and in her own words to *disentangle*, all the allusions, — to treat her, in short, as we treat Clarissa Harlowe when we have a fortnight of leisure and rainy weather in the country. After this by no means terrible ordeal, let them attack our admiration if they dare, or if they so much as remember its existence.

II.

MADAME DE LA FAYETTE.

IN the times of Mme. de Sévigné, at her side, and united with her by ties of the closest intimacy, there lived a woman whose history seems almost to have been confounded with that of her amiable friend. She it was whom Boileau designated as the "most intellectual woman and best female writer in France." Yet she wrote little, and that leisurely and merely for amusement, — carelessly, also, and with no trace of system. She hated letter-writing so cordially that we have but a few very brief letters from her hand, and it is in Mme. de Sévigné's rather than her own that her acquaintance must be sought. Yet she played a part in her day, — special, serious, and difficult, graceful and important, — a conspicuous part, also, and one which in its own line has never been surpassed. To an intrinsic tenderness of heart and wealth of romantic imagination she united a natural precision of mind, and as her clever friend used to say, a *divine reason*, which never played her false. These characteristics appeared both in her writings and in her life, and she presents a model for study in an age prolific in models of many kinds. In a recent rehabilitation of the Hôtel de Rambouillet an attempt has been made to represent Mme. de Maintenon as the accomplished and trium-

phant heiress of its spirit. There is a remark of Segrais which tells rather in favor of Mme. de La Fayette, who was a direct descendant of Madame de Rambouillet, though retaining no trace of the *précieuse*. After an elaborate portrait of the latter, he adds, "Mme. de La Fayette had learned much from her, but Mme. de La Fayette had a stronger mind." This consummate successor of Mme. de Rambouillet, who was always the friend of Mme. de Sévigné, and for a long time that of Mme. de Maintenon, has her rank and date in our literary history clearly assigned, — both because she reformed the novel, and because a part of that divine reason which was in her she employed to modify and render permanent in literature a certain tender style of composition, which had been greatly abused, indeed, but which she only needed to touch in order to recommend it to the favor of those critics of graver taste who had been disposed to abolish it altogether. In this secondary style, where refinement and a certain interesting quality suffice, but where no amount of genius seems superfluous, if it occur, — a style which the *Ars Poetica* does not mention, but which is consecrated by Prevost, Le Sage, and Jean Jacques, and whose best specimens were then to be found in the moving parts of *Bérénice* or even *Iphigénie*, — Mme. de La Fayette accomplished precisely that which her illustrious contemporaries had emulously attempted in the graver and more dignified walks of literature. *L'Astrée*, while it introduced into France the novel, properly so called, had served as a stock for those innumerable grafts — *Cyrus*, *Cleopatra*, *Polixandra*, *Clelia*, &c. Boileau cut short their succession by his ridicule, as effectually as he disposed of the *Moïse Sauvé*, the *Pucelle*,

and the whole progeny of epic poems. Mme. de La Fayette, without seeming to ridicule any, and appearing in the wake and under the cover of those predecessors whom Segrais and Huet hardly distinguished from herself, and smothered with the same indiscriminate eulogy, dealt them their heaviest blow in the *Princess de Clèves*. It is quite evident that she understood what she was doing, and that she intended to do it. She used to say that a sentence struck out of a book was worth a louis-d'or and a word twenty francs — a significant remark from her lips when we reflect upon the ten-volume novels through which readers of that day had to wade. Proportion, temperance, decency, simple and natural methods substituted for grand catastrophes, — such are the items of that reform; or, to speak less ambitiously, that re-touching of the romance which she effected. In all this she was clearly of the age of Louis XIV.

The long and inviolable connection between Mme. de La Fayette and M. de la Rochefoucauld causes her own life to resemble a romance — a moral one, indeed, but a romance still; less in the ordinary course than the life of Mme. de Sévigné, who loved her daughter only; less artificial and premeditated than that of Mme. de Maintenon, who simply aimed at a marriage with the king. It is interesting to study this alliance between a warm heart and a keen and thoroughly disenchanted intellect, and the softening influence exercised by the former; this late but steadfast attachment between two earnest souls, where the sensibility of the one corrects the misanthropy of the other; the delicate tenderness which they display, the mutual encouragement, the softness which is never delusive,

and the fire — Mme. de Clèves, in short, in feeble health and slightly pensive mood, beside M. de Nemours, an old man and the author of *Maxims*. Such is the life of Mme. de La Fayette, and the exact relation of her personality to her romance. Her remarkable freedom from illusions, the sad logic upon which her life was based, have been somewhat idealized even in her own romance, and also, as I think, in those other novels which in some sort emanated from her, and constitute her posterity in *Eugène de Rothelin*, *Mlle. de Clermont*, and *Edouard*. However tender the spirit that pervades these felicitous creations, reason too is there, and the breath of human experience cools the ardor of passion. Along with the affectionate and self-abandoning heart there is an influence prompt to warn and to restrain. M. de la Rochefoucauld, in short, is ever present.

If Mme. de La Fayette reformed the romance of chivalry and sentiment, as then existing in France, and introduced that particular form of the novel where fancy is to some extent reconciled with observation, it may also be affirmed that she was the first to furnish a really illustrious example of those refined, legitimate, enduring attachments, sacred in their constancy,¹ which sometimes pervade each hour and moment of a life for years before its close. Friendships like these were characteristic of the habits of the old social regime, and well nigh perished with it. They can never appear until society is firmly established and highly cultivated, which previous to that era society had never been. The *Princess de Clèves* and her friendship for M. de la

¹ "Exemplum cana simus uterque coma," says the antique elegy.

Rochefoucauld constitute almost equal claims on the part of Mme. de La Fayette to a lasting and affecting fame. They mark important points both in the literary and social history of the reign of Louis XIV.

I should, however, have left it to the readers of Mme. de Sévigné's letters to reconstruct, out of their pleasant fancies, that life so simple in its incidents, if the perusal of an unpublished and very confidential document had not stimulated me to place it in a new setting.

Mme. de La Fayette's father, a field-marshal and the governor of Havre, is said to have been a worthy man, and educated his daughter with great care. Her mother, whose maiden name was de Pena, came from Provence, and numbered some troubadour laureate or other among her ancestors. Mlle. Marie Madeleine Pioche de La Vergne read and studied more in early life than most even of the clever individuals of the previous generation had done. Mme. de Choisy, for instance, displayed a vast amount of native wit, both in her conversation and her letters; but she did not even know how to spell. Mme. de Sévigné and Mme. de La Fayette, who were six or seven years younger than their friend, had thorough culture superadded to excellent natural ability. We have direct testimony to their accomplishments in the transports of Ménage, who is understood to have fallen in love regularly with each of his pretty pupils. He celebrated, in all the forms of Latin verse, the beauty, the grace, the elegance of speech and composition of Mme. de La Fayette, or Mlle. de La Vergne Laverna, as he used to call her.¹ Subsequently he in-

¹ Laverna in Latin signifies Goddess of Thieves — a circumstance which was the occasion of many a gallant witticism on

roduced her to his learned friend Huet, who also became one of her literary counsellors. Segrain, from whom, in connection with Mme. de Sévigné, all necessary information about Mme. de La Fayette may be gleaned, relates the following: "Three months after Mme. de La Fayette commenced the study of Latin she knew more about it than her masters, M. Ménage and Father Rapin. Once, when she was construing, they fell into a dispute about the true rendering of a certain passage, and neither would accept the other's view. 'You are both wrong,' exclaimed Mme. de La Fayette, and actually gave them the proper translation of the passage, they agreeing that she was correct. It was a poet whom she expounded, for she did not love prose, and never read Cicero; but being very fond of poetry, she read principally in Virgil and Horace, and as her own mind was poetical and her taste in this art

his part. He could cry "Thief" with all the energy of Mascarille.

Omine felici nomen præsaga dedere
Fata tibi. Furtis pulchra Laverna præest
Tu veneres omnes cunctis formosa puellis.
Tu cunctis sensus surripis una viris.

He also addressed verses to Mme. de Sévigné, Mlle. de Scudéry, and Mme. Scarron, but Mme. de La Fayette remains decidedly his beauty by appointment. The pretty Elzevir edition of his poems displays her name on every page. Decastichs, ballads, eclogues, elegies, are showered upon her. I have searched for something which should not seem too insipid, and select this madrigal, which possibly appears in better taste because it is in Italian: —

In van Filli tu chiedi
Se lungamente durerà l'adore
Che'l tuo bel guardo mi destò nel core
Chi lo potrebbe dire?
Incerta o Filli, è l'ora del morire.

fine, she easily fathomed the meaning of the authors in question." A little further on he reverts to the merits of M. Ménage. "Where shall we find another poet like him, who could make good verses in Latin, Greek, and Italian. He was a great man, however slandered by those who envied him; and yet he did not understand all the niceties of poetry, while Mme. de La Fayette did." The very person who thus preferred and appreciated the poets was also, as M. de la Rochefoucauld afterwards said of her, — employing a phrase which has become stereotyped, — distinctively *genuine*. Her mind was at once beautiful and practical, and in this union lay her merit as well as her charm. Withal, as Segrain assures us, Mme. de La Fayette was very careful not to shock other women with her Latin and her other scientific attainments. Ménage says that being asked by M. Huyghens what an iambus was, she replied that it was the opposite of a trochee; but we may be sure that nothing but M. Huyghens and his question would have induced her to speak thus of the trochee and the iambus.¹

She had lost her father at the age of fifteen. Her mother, a good person, Retz says, but vain and over-

¹ Tallemant des Réaux, that persistent reporter of naughty speeches, attributes one to Mlle. de La Vergne, about her master, Ménage. "That tiresome Ménage will soon be here." He reports her, however, with good intent, and to prove that the pedantic gallant was not the first consideration with his pupils. We do not need this testimony to assure us that Mme. de La Fayette was under no illusion with regard to the faults of poor Ménage, and I fear that she was thinking of him among others, and of all his politeness, when she said that it was a rare thing to find honesty among savants.

forward, had married again, after a short interval, the Chevalier Renaud de Sévigné, so deeply implicated in the intrigues of the Fronde, and destined to prove one of the most active in rescuing the cardinal from the Castle of Nantes. In the cardinal's Memoirs, when speaking of his imprisonment at Nantes and the entertaining visits which he there received, he says, "Mme. de La Vergne, who had married for a second husband M. le Chevalier Renaud de Sévigné, and who was then residing with him at Anjou, came to see me, and brought her daughter, Mlle. de La Vergne, now Mme. de La Fayette. She was very pretty and winning, and moreover somewhat resembled Mme. de Lesdiguières. I was much pleased with her, and she not at all so with me, either because I really did not attract her fancy, or because the distrust with which her mother and father-in-law had inspired her even in Paris, by the story of my irregularities and my various amours, had put her on her guard against me. I consoled myself for her cruelty with my usual facility." Mlle. de La Vergne at twenty needed but her own good sense to make her despise the prisoner smitten by this idle and trite caprice, and so easily consoled.

Married in 1655 to the Count de La Fayette, the most remarkable circumstance to her about this union — and that probably which most fired her imagination — was, that she thus became the sister-in-law of Mother Angelique de La Fayette, lady superior of the convent of Chaillot, and once maid of honor to Anne of Austria, whose singular love-passage with Louis XIII. forms a chaste and simple romance, very similar to those of which the Princess de Clèves is the representative. Her husband, after giving her the name which she was

to render famous,¹ and which was already irradiated by so soft a lustre, vanishes, and is, so to speak, blotted out of her life. Distinct trace of him is no longer to be found. She had by him two sons, of whom she was very fond. One was a military character, whose establishment in life occasioned her much anxiety, and who did not long survive her; the other, the Abbé de La Fayette, was provided with excellent abbeys; and little else is known of him, save that he lent his mother's manuscripts very carelessly, and lost them.

Mme. de La Fayette was early introduced to the Hôtel de Rambouillet, and learned much from the marquise. M. Ræderer, whose interest it is that none of the shafts of Molière's wit should hit the Hôtel de Rambouillet, represents it as having been depopulated and broken up somewhat earlier than was really the case. Mme. de La Fayette had time to go there before her marriage, and to profit by the experience, and so had Mme. de Sévigné. M. Auger, in a notice of Mme. de La Fayette, which is somewhat dry in manner, but otherwise accurate and interesting, says, in this connection, "Introduced in her youth to the society of the Hôtel de Rambouillet, her natural strength of mind and correctness of judgment would never have enabled her to resist the contagion of that false taste whereof the Hôtel was the centre, had not the study of the Latin poets proved a preservative," &c., &c. Surely this preservative ought first of all to have acted on *Ménage*! This is great injustice to the Hôtel de Rambouillet, and M. Ræderer is

¹ "There is a species of woman who annihilates or buries her husband so completely, that there is no more mention of him in the world. His very existence becomes matter of doubt."—*La Bruyère on Woman*.

perfectly right in deprecating such a mode of expression ; but he certainly deceives himself when he represents the Hôtel as the legitimate cradle of good taste, and Mlle. de Scudéry as rather tolerated there than lauded and admired. He forgets that Voiture, as long as he lived, engrossed conversation in that circle ; and what Voiture was in matters of taste and intellect is well known. As for Mlle. de Scudéry, we need only read Segrais and Huet to see what account was made of that peerless maiden, as well as of the *illustrious Bassa* and the *great Cyrus*, and all those remarkably *tender* and *natural* verses of hers which Despréaux translated, but *which he could not criticise*. Now, what Segrais and Huet extolled in similar terms cannot have been judged very severely in a world of which they were the final oracles. Mme. de La Fayette, who had a sound and acute mind, was related to that world, just as was Mme. de Sévigné, by appropriating its best. By her age she belonged wholly to the new court, and even with less strength of mind she could not have failed of adopting its truer standard of elegance. During the early years of her married life, she had frequent opportunities of seeing, at the convent of Chaillot, the young princess of England with Queen Henrietta, who was then an exile and living in retirement there. After the young princess had become Madame,¹ and the brightest ornament of the court, Mme. de La Fayette, although ten years her senior, kept up the old intimacy, always had her private access, and was considered a special favorite. In the charming story which she has given us of the brilliant years of this princess, speaking of herself in the third person, she estimates herself thus :

¹ The customary title of the king's brother's wife. — TR.

“Mlle. de Trimouille and Mme. de La Fayette were of this number [the number of those who saw much of Madame]. The first pleased her by her amiability, and by a certain ingenuous habit of telling all that was in her heart, which recalled the simplicity of the primitive ages. That the latter should have attracted her was merely a happy accident, for although she was thought to have merit, it was merit of so grave an order as hardly to have been winning to a princess as young as Madame.” At the age, therefore, of about thirty, Mme. de La Fayette found herself surrounded by the polished gallantry of the most prosperous years of Louis XIV. She attended all the parties of Madame at Saint Cloud and Fontainebleau, — as a spectator rather than actor; never, as she says, receiving Madame’s confidence concerning certain affairs; but when they were over, and had become common talk, hearing their story from her own lips, and writing it down to please her. “‘You write well,’ Madame used to say. ‘Write, then, and I will furnish you excellent materials.’” “It was sometimes a difficult task,” Mme. de La Fayette confesses, “to give such a turn to the truth as to make it intelligible, and at the same time neither disagreeable nor injurious to the princess.” One, among these many cases, which demanded all Mme. de La Fayette’s delicacy, and excited the mirth of Madame over the trouble which the amiable narrator had to take, must, I imagine, have been the following: “She [Madame] was intimate with the Countess de Soissons. . . . She meant but to please the king as a sister-in-law; but I fancy that she pleased him after another sort. I think, too, that she liked him, not as a brother merely, but possibly far more; and, in short, as they were both

extremely agreeable and naturally deferential in their ways, and as they met daily, in the midst of all sorts of gayeties and amusements, it seemed, to the eyes of the world, as if they experienced that mutual fascination which commonly precedes a great passion." Madame died in the arms of Mme. de La Fayette, who never left her in her last moments. Her description of that death forms one of the most beautiful and touching of all death-bed scenes. It is couched in these simple terms, which shed light on all the attendant circumstances: "I went up to her apartment. She told me that she was vexed; but the ill-humor of which she spoke would have been the complaisance of any other woman, so sweet was she by nature, and so incapable of bitterness and wrath. After dinner she rested upon the cushions. She had made me place them about her so that she could lean against me. During her slumber she changed so much that I, who had long been watching her, was amazed. I thought it must have been her mood of mind which so enhanced the beauty of her face; but I was wrong, for I had seen her asleep often, and never when she looked less gentle than now." And farther on, "Monsieur was at her bedside. She embraced him, and said, with a sweetness fit to melt the hardest heart, 'Alas! you have not loved me for a long time, but you have been unjust. I never wronged you.' Monsieur seemed deeply moved, and every one else in the room was so affected that no sound was audible save one of weeping. When the king had left the room, and I remained beside her, she said to me, 'Mme. de La Fayette, my nostrils are contracting.' I answered only by my tears; but she was sinking fast." On the 30th of June, 1673, Mme. de La

Fayette wrote to Mme. de Sévigné, "It is three years to-day since I saw Madame die. I re-read some of her letters yesterday. My heart is full of her."

In the midst of this brilliant and courtly world, where Mme. de La Fayette, still young and with a noble and attractive if not beautiful face, lived for a period of ten years, was she merely a watchful observer? Had she no active heart-interest save her attachment to Madame? no one private preference? Some time in the year 1665, as I conjecture for reasons which I shall presently adduce, she had chosen, as the friend of her soul, M. de la Rochefoucauld, who was already fifty-two years old.¹

She wrote early, — from the mere love of it, — but always sparingly. It was the age of portraits, and Mme. de La Fayette, in 1659, executed one of Mme. de Sévigné, which has been reputed anonymous. "It flatters me," said the latter, when she discovered it among the loose papers of Mlle. de Trémouille, in 1675; "but those who loved me sixteen years ago may possibly have thought it like." This guise of youth, perpetuated by her friend Mme. de Sévigné, seems to us to wear immortally. When Madame, in urging literary labor upon Mme. de La Fayette, said, "You write well," she had doubtless read the *Princess de Montpensier*, our author's first little novel, printed in 1660 or 1662.² The elegance and sprightliness of the nar-

¹ Petitot, in his learned notice of Mme. de La Fayette (*Collection des Mémoires relatifs à l'Histoire de France*, Series II. Vol. LXIV.), has, in my opinion, dated the commencement of this connection ten years too early.

² Moréri's Dictionary says 1662; Quérard's, 1660. It is certain that the first edition published with the king's sanction bears date 1662. It has no author's name attached.

rative distinguish it from all the other novels and tales of the day, and announce a correct taste and cultivated mind. The constructive imagination of Mme. de La Fayette recurred fondly to the brilliant and polished era of the Valois,—to the days of Charles IX. and Henry II. — which she slightly idealized and embellished after a manner of which we have glimpses in Queen Margaret's graceful descriptions. The *Princess de Montpensier*, the *Princess de Clèves*, and the *Countess de Tende* deal wholly with those reigns, whose vices and crimes have, perhaps, too entirely eclipsed, in our eyes, their intellectual culture. The court of Madame, in wit, in intrigue, and in vice as well, wanted not a certain affinity with the Valois epoch; and the fragmentary history of Mme. de La Fayette constantly recalls the memoirs of that beautiful queen, who, however, is not always trustworthy. The perfidious Vardes and the haughty M. de Guiche are figures perfectly suited to the court of Henry II.; nor did that of Madame, even, lack its Chevalier de Lorraine. In this world Mme. de La Fayette played a kind of authoritative part, and supplied the fashionables with sound criticism. Two months before Madame's melancholy death, Mme. de Montmorency wrote jestingly to M. de Bussy (May 1, 1670), "Mme. de La Fayette, the favorite of Madame, has had her skull fractured by a chimney cornice, which showed not the slightest respect for a head crowned with the glory that emanates from the favor of so great a princess. Before her accident she had published a letter designed to ridicule what is called the fashionable dialect. I will send it to you." Then follows the letter, composed in that unintelligible jargon of which she desired

to cure the *beau monde*. It purports to be from a jealous lover to his mistress. Boileau himself could not have done better. Mme. de La Fayette was the Despréaux, one atom mollified, of court manners. At the close of the year 1670 appeared *Zayde*, Mme. de La Fayette's first real work,—for the *Princess de Montpensier* was not a work, and, save by a few individuals, was barely noticed in its day. *Zayde* bore upon its title-page the name of Segrais; nor was this a perfectly transparent fiction. The public easily credited Segrais with its authorship. Bussy accepted the book as Segrais', and betook himself to its perusal with great delight; “for,” said he, “everything that Segrais writes is pretty.” When he had finished reading, he criticised and praised it, still under the same impression. Since then, even, persons have not been wanting to ascribe to Segrais the paternity at least of its major portion. Adry, who published an edition of the *Princess de Clèves* in 1807, sets the matter aside, and leaves it in doubt, thus apparently inclining to the side of the poet-wit. But the excellent Adry, who sets up for an authority in bibliography, has a mind somewhat enslaved to the literal. Segrais, however, says, with what would seem to be sufficient clearness, in the collected fragments of his conversations, “The *Princess de Clèves* is by Mme. de La Fayette. *Zayde*, which appeared under my name, is hers also. It is true that I had some share in the work, but only in the arrangement of the plot, where the rules of art are very strictly observed.” To be sure, Segrais says elsewhere, “When *my Zayde* was printed, Mme. de La Fayette had a copy bound up with white paper between the leaves, for the purpose of revising it and making cor-

rections, especially in the language; but in years she found nothing to alter; and even now I do not think that anything could well be changed." It is evident that Segrais, like many another honest editor, held his peace and blushed slightly whenever *his Zayde* was mentioned. The author and the editor are easily, and almost insensibly, confounded. In the middle ages, — and even in the sixteenth century, — a Latin phrase copied or quoted claimed almost as large a share of an author's vanity as one of his own thoughts. Where one has been the first to put in circulation a romance or a poem, one is more ticklish still. Godfathers of this sort do not in the least resent, and only half-contradict, a sly suspicion. Nay, if one but hears his name constantly connected with the praise or censure of any work, he is led by the circumstance to adopt that work more entirely. I myself, if my memory serves me, have had Ronsard¹ so constantly flung in my face, that I can hardly refrain from saying, "my Ronsard." Besides, it is a flattering reflection that one has been the first bearer of good tidings, or even of bad ones. Our good Adry, failing to catch the humor of the thing, seizes quite gratuitously upon this expression of Segrais — "my Zayde." Huët is sufficiently explicit on the point in his *Origines de Caën*, — still more so in his Latin commentary on himself. "Ill-informed individuals," he says, "are greatly aggrieved that I should have alluded, as I did in the *Origines de Caën*,

¹ Pierre de Ronsard, a celebrated French poet of the sixteenth century, whose fame, owing chiefly to the unfavorable judgments of Malherbe and Boileau, had considerably declined, but was triumphantly vindicated by M. Sainte-Beuve, in 1828, in his *Tableau de la Poesie Française au dixième siècle*. [Tr.]

to the fame of Segrain; but I can attest the fact there stated by the testimony of my own eyes, and by several letters from Mme. de La Fayette herself, for she sent me all the parts of the work in succession, as fast as they were composed, and made me read and review them." Finally, Mme. de La Fayette used often to say to Huot, — to whom *Zayde* had suggested the idea of his *Origine des Romans*, — "You know that we have married our children."

To be sure, the style of *Zayde* does not differ so decidedly from that of Segrain's novels as absolutely to preclude all misunderstanding. *Zayde* is still in the old-fashioned and purely romanesque manner. If we discover the beginnings of reform, it is only in details and in the sequence of the narrative, — in the mode of expression rather than in the conception. *Zayde* occupies a kind of mean between *L'Astrée* and the tales of the Abbé Prevost; it is the connecting link between the two. In both we find sudden and extraordinary passions, incredible personal likenesses, prolonged misunderstandings fruitful in adventure, resolutions formed on the glimpse of a portrait or a bracelet. Unhappy lovers fly the court for horrible deserts, where they endure absolute want. They pass the after-dinner hours in the woods, telling the rocks the particulars of their martyrdom, and then reënter the *galleries* of their mansions adorned with all manner of paintings. On the sea-shore they come unexpectedly upon unhappy princesses, stretched out, apparently lifeless, who have escaped shipwreck, in magnificent clothes, and who inspire them with love as soon as ever they languidly open their eyes. Shipwrecks, deserts, tumbles into the sea, and raptures abound. All is more or less in the style

of the old romances of Heliodorus and d'Urfé,—the Spanish romanesque, the style of Cervantes. Mme. de La Fayette's special originality lies in the extreme delicacy of her analysis, and her introduction of the tender sentiments in their utmost subtilty and complexity. Alphonso's jealousy, which appears so improbable to the contemporary mind, and which Segrain assures us was drawn from the life, but softened rather than exaggerated; is delineated in the height of its irrationality, and followed through its deepest labyrinthine windings. Here we see marks of genius, there traces of acute observation. A fine passage, which has been qualified as admirable by d'Alembert, is the one where the two lovers, who had parted one short month before ignorant of one another's language, meet unexpectedly, approach and speak each in the other's tongue, which has been acquired in the interval, and then stop short, blushing at the mutual confession. My own preference is for expressions of sentiment like the following, which Mme. de La Fayette never could have penned without some secret reference to herself: "Ah, Don Garcia, you were right! Those only are passions which smite us suddenly and take us by surprise. The others are but connections to which we yield our hearts deliberately. A genuine attraction snatches us irresistibly from ourselves.

I do not think that Mme. de La Fayette personally could ever have known aught of those passions which snatch us from ourselves. When she chose M. de la Rochefoucauld for her friend, she was, as I have said, thirty-two or three years old, and he was fifty-two. She had, of course, long been accustomed to meet him in the world, but it is the peculiar tie between them of

which I propose to speak. We shall see by the ensuing letter, — never before published, and which is as frank as could be desired, — that at the time of the publication of the *Maxims* and the appearance in society of the Count de Saint-Paul, there was talk of this intimacy between Mme. de La Fayette and M. de la Rochefoucauld as of a recent thing. Now, the publication of the *Maxims* and the introduction of the count, supposing the age of the latter to have been sixteen or seventeen, were almost simultaneous, and give us the date 1665 or 1666. This letter was addressed by Mme. de La Fayette to Mme. de Sablé, an old friend of M. de la Rochefoucauld, who had had a large share in the concoction of the *Maxims*, and who had been for some time intimately connected with Port Royal, though rather, it would seem, through fear of death, and intent to reform, than by virtue of a complete conversion.

“Monday evening. — I could not answer your note yesterday because I had guests, and I hardly know how to answer it to-day, for I find it altogether too kind. I am ashamed to have you lavish your praises upon me; and yet I value your good opinion, and would not have you say aught but what you think. So all the reply I shall make will be to say that the Count de Saint-Paul has just left me, and that we have been talking of you for a whole hour, — as you know I can. We have also spoken of a man whom I shall take the liberty of comparing with yourself in the charm of his mind. I know not but the comparison may be offensive; but though it were so on the lips of another, it would still be great praise from me if all they say is true. I am convinced that M. de Saint-Paul has heard the rumors of which I speak, and I made some allusion

to them when he was here, but I fear he did not take me seriously. I beg of you, the first time you see him, to mention the reports. It will come in quite naturally, for I have given him the *Maxims*, and doubtless he will tell you so. But I beseech you to speak of the affair in such a way as to convince him that it is of no importance. I am not quite sure how you yourself regard it; and so I cannot feel certain that you will say the right thing. It may, I fancy, be necessary for me to begin by convincing my ambassador. However, I must trust to your ingenuity, which transcends all ordinary rules. Only convince him. I hate mortally that persons of his age should suppose I have affairs of gallantry. All people older than themselves appear to them a hundred, and they are amazed that such should be held of any account; besides, he would believe it more readily of M. de la Rochefoucauld than of any one else. In short, I wish him to think nothing at all about it, except that the gentleman named is one of my friends. I beg that you will also disabuse him of the idea that I forgot your message. It is generous — is it not? — to remind you of one service by requesting another.

(On the margin.) “I must not forget to tell you that I have found the Count de Saint-Paul terribly clever.”

To enhance the interest of this letter, let us recall the precise situation. M. de Saint-Paul, the son of Mme. de Longueville, and probably also of M. de la Rochefoucauld, is visiting Mme. de La Fayette, who passes for the object of a last tender passion on the part of the latter, and who wants the young man undeceived (or deceived) upon this head. The “terrible cleverness” of the youthful prince must, I think, have gone

straight to the heart of Mme. de Longueville, to whom the postscript at least, and probably the remainder of the letter, were promptly shown. That charming expression, applicable to all late amours, "I hate mortally that people of his age should suppose I have affairs of gallantry," corresponds exactly with this thought of the Princess de Clèves. "Mme. de Clèves, who was then at an age to imagine that a woman cannot inspire love after twenty-five, was greatly astonished at the affection of the king for the duchess" (de Valentinois). This idea, we perceive, was familiar to Mme. de La Fayette. She feared above all things the seeming to feel or awaken passion at the age when many affect it. Her fine sense became a kind of ultimate modesty.

I insist the more strongly upon the fact that the intimate and acknowledged relations between herself and M. de la Rochefoucauld did not begin earlier than this, because I find the influence upon him of her loving spirit directly contrary to the tone of the Maxims. I think, if she had been as constantly about him before as after their composition, she would have made him prune and amend them, and that La Rochefoucauld the misanthrope, who declared that he had found love nowhere but in novels, and had never experienced any such thing himself, was not the man of whom our heroine afterwards said, "M. de la Rochefoucauld stimulated my intellect, but I reformed his heart."

In another unpublished note of hers to Mme. de Sablé, who herself had composed maxims, I read, "You will offend me terribly if you do not show me your Maxims. Mme. du Plessis has inspired me with a strange curiosity to see them, because she says they are fair and reasonable, and will prove that all sensible

people are not as thoroughly convinced of the universal corruption of the race as M. de la Rochefoucauld." It was this idea of universal corruption which she set herself to resist in La Rochefoucauld, and which she actually corrected. The desire of brightening and sweetening his noble spirit was doubtless what rendered their close connection alluring alike to her reason and her humane sympathies.

The old chevalier of the Fronde, though cynical and gouty, was not exactly what might be supposed from his book alone. He had studied little, Segrais says, but his marvellous acumen and knowledge of the world supplied the place of other learning. In his youth he had plunged into all the vices of his time, and had issued from the ordeal sounder in mind than in body, if that can be called sound which was so very sad. But the gentleness and infinite charm of his manner were in no wise impaired. He was uniformly and perfectly courteous, and improved daily upon acquaintance. He was a man of *tête-à-têtes*, and not fond of raising his voice. Had he been required to speak on some serious subject before an audience of five or six, his courage would have failed. The needful address before the French Academy kept him out of it. In June, 1692, when the tidings reached him in one evening of the death of M. de Longueville and his grandson, the Chevalier de Marsillac, as well as of the wound received by his son, the Prince de Marsillac, when, as Mme. de Sévigné says, this *hail-storm* descended upon him, his sorrow and his self-command were alike noble. "On that cruel occasion," she adds, "I saw his soul laid bare; and it is a soul unsurpassed for fortitude, wisdom, tenderness, and strength." A little farther on she says

that he was a *patriarch*, and knew almost as well as herself a mother's tenderness. This is the real La Rochefoucauld as reformed by Mme. de La Fayette.

Between the years 1666 and 1670, the health of Mme. de La Fayette being not then as delicate as it afterwards became, the favor which she found with Madame gave her the opportunity and the means of appearing often at court. It was only after Madame's death, and when Mme. de La Fayette herself was growing feeble, that the connection we are describing assumed precisely the aspect under which Mme. de Sévigné has represented it. The letters of this precious friend, although they become irregular at this very date, acquaint us with the most trivial circumstances in the history of these two, and even reveal the happy monotony of their daily life, and the deep tenderness of their habitual intercourse. "Their poor health," she writes, "rendered them mutually dependent, and gave them such leisure to enjoy one another's good qualities as no other kind of relation would have afforded. There is, ordinarily, no time for affection at court, but the whirlpool which was so stormy for others was tranquil for them, and left them ample space for delicious communion. A tie like this seems to me stronger than any passion." It would be impossible to adduce all the kindred items which might be gathered from every one — so to speak — of Mme. de Sévigné's letters, for there are few in which Mme. de La Fayette is not named, while several of them were written, or at least completed, at her house, amid the lively compliments of M. de la Rochefoucauld — *who was on the spot*. On their best days — their days of tolerable health — there are social dinners enlivened by a grace-

ful gayety and sallies of arch fun over *that goose of a Mme. de Marans*, and the household arrangements of Mme. de Brissac and the duke. Then there are graver but no less delightful days, when, at Saint-Maur, — in the mansion which the prince had lent to Gourville, and which had been placed at the disposal of Mme. de La Fayette, — the *Poétique* of Despréaux is read before a select company, and considered a masterpiece. On another occasion, in defiance of Despréaux and his *Poétique*, they went to Lulli, and tears were shed over certain passages in the opera of Cadmus. “I was not the only one whom it overcame,” says Mme. de Sévigné; “the heart of Mme. de La Fayette took *instant alarm*.” How finely this is put! Her heart took the alarm. Ah, Zayde, your dismay reveals that romantic tenderness which was only half satisfied, and would not have borne a too complete awakening. There are days, too, when Mme. de La Fayette can still pay a short visit to the court, and when the king places her in his own calash, along with the other ladies, and shows her the beauties of Versailles, as a simple private gentleman might do; and such an excursion, such a success, affords material (sage as we are) for long conversations, and even for letters less brief than usual, on the part of one who was not fond of writing. And then Mme. de Grignan becomes slightly jealous at times, especially when Mme. de Montespan makes our heroine a present of Sainte-Lucie’s wooden inkstand; ¹

¹ We gather from Mme. de Sévigné’s letters, that Mme. de Grignan used to be always saying, “I cannot see that your Mme. de La Fayette is so extraordinarily fond of you. She has not written you two lines in ten years. She knows how to consult her personal ease and comfort, and, indolent as she is, keeps

but Mme. de Sévigné makes all smooth, and contrives to insure a constant interchange of compliments and amenities between her daughter and her best friend. Even when Mme. de La Fayette had ceased to go to the court, and no longer embraced the king's knees with tears of gratitude, — when M. de la Rochefoucauld himself was dead, — she retained the royal consideration and favor. “No woman,” declares Mme. de Sévigné, “ever effected so much without leaving her place.” Louis XIV. always loved in her the favorite of Madame and the witness of her affecting death. She remained associated in his mind with the pleasant years gone by, having never afterwards appeared at court.

But Versailles, the *Poétique* of Despréaux, Lulli's opera, and the merriment over Marans, are always speedily interrupted by her wretched health, and by that tertiary fever which cannot be forgotten, and soon becomes the principal occupation of her life. In her spacious and beautiful garden in the Rue de Vaugirard, so green and shady, — in Gourville's house at Saint-Maur, which she frequented with the freedom of an intimate friend, — at Fleury-sous-Meudon, where she went to breathe the air of the woods, we find her alike sick and sad; we see her tall and sombre figure

a sharp lookout for her own advantage.” Gourville, whom it was Mme. de La Fayette's misfortune too long to treat with the confidence we award a steadfast friend, has uttered a similar but still more malicious insinuation. Lassay, in the sort of Memorial which he has published, brings against Mme. de La Fayette a formal accusation of selfishness and a determination to secure her own aggrandizement. But we must not decide without hearing both sides.

growing thinner and wasting away. Her life for twenty years was one low, lingering fever, and the bulletins all resolve themselves into something like this: "Mme. de La Fayette goes to-morrow to a little house at Meudon, where she has been before. She will stay there a fortnight, suspended as it were between heaven and earth. She wants not to speak or think, to listen or reply; she is tired of saying, 'Good morning' and 'Good evening.' Rest alleviates her sufferings, and rest she must have. I shall visit her occasionally. M. de la Rochefoucauld is confined to the chair, you remember. He is incredibly sad, and it is easy to understand what troubles him." The absence of Mme. de La Fayette was doubtless more afflictive to M. de la Rochefoucauld than the gout and all the rest of his ordinary ills combined.

But the melancholy naturally induced by such a situation did not preclude the reappearance, at short intervals, of smiles and graces. Among the familiar nicknames which the members of this clique bestowed upon one another, and by virtue of which Mme. Scaron became "The Thaw," de Colbert "The North Wind," and M. de Pomponne "The Rain Storm," Mme. de La Fayette received the appellation of "The Fog," because fogs do lift occasionally and reveal charming horizons. In a gentle, pensive, resigned good sense, unselfish and engaging, displaying itself in just and striking observations, which long haunted the memory, lay the perpetual fascination of her presence and her mind. "To exist is enough," she used sometimes to say, as she accepted her enforced inactivity. It was a remark perfectly characteristic of her; who said of

Montaigne, that "it would be delightful to have such a neighbor."¹

An extreme and tearful sensibility broke in, at intervals, upon the steady rule of reason, like a fountain bubbling up in level ground. We have seen her *taking alarm* at the emotion produced by music. When Mme. de Sévigné left for Provence, she had to avoid saying good by, or alluding to her farewell visit as the last. Mme. de La Fayette's tenderness could not endure the parting from so near a friend. One day, when the duke was present, something was said of the campaign which he was to open in five or six months, and at the sudden thought of the dangers to which his grace would be exposed she burst into tears. These overflowings were, we may imagine, all the more precious and charming, in that she was really a person of so much judgment and repose of mind.

Feeble as she was, her attention to matters of essential importance never flagged, and without stirring she maintained a general vigilance. If she reformed the heart of M. de la Rochefoucauld, she also repaired his fortunes. She was learned in matters of law, and prevented the loss of her friend's most valuable possessions by furnishing him with the means of proving that they were entailed. Under such circumstances we can understand why she wrote few letters, and those only as a matter of necessity. It was the one sore spot between herself and Mme. de Sévigné. The main drift of such of her epistles as we do possess is, that

¹ She would not have said the same of Malebranche; and like a true friend of Huet, she avowed to Ménage that she could understand nothing at all of the "*Recherche de La Vérité*." To her it must have seemed at once dogmatical and far-fetched.

she can write but two words, and would write more if she had not the headache. Even M. de La Fayette, who suddenly arrives one day, I know not whence, serves as an excuse. One needs but to peruse the pretty note beginning, "Now then, my dear, why are you screaming like an eagle?" to understand the manner of Mme. de La Fayette's life, and the vast difference in tone between herself and Mme. de Sévigné. In this occur the often quoted words, "You are in Provence, my love; your hours are free, your mind yet more so. You still enjoy writing to everybody. My case is just the opposite. If I had a lover who wanted to hear from me every day, I would break with him." "Mme. de La Fayette was thoroughly genuine and frank; you could not doubt her word."¹ "She would confer no favors on any person whatever until convinced that they were deserved; and this is why some called her hard, though she was in reality tender."² Mme. de Maintenon, with whom Mme. de La Fayette had been very intimate, had the same singular straightforwardness, but her character was less open. Equally judicious, she was not so truthful; and this difference helped to make a coolness between them. In 1672, when Mme. Scarron was privately educating the illegitimate children of Louis XIV. on the outskirts of the Faubourg Saint-Germain, near Vaugirard, and just beyond Mme. de La Fayette's house, they were still close friends. The latter, as well as Mme. de Coulanges, sometimes received tidings of the recluse, and they even paid her a visit in company. But Mme. Scarron's confidence was gradually withdrawn, and there followed conjec-

¹ Mme. de Sévigné.² Segraisiana.

tures and reported remarks, such as always excite displeasure between friends. "The idea of becoming religious has never occurred to my mind," wrote Mme. de Maintenon to the Abbé Testu; "so you may reassure Mme. de La Fayette on that head." By way of instructing her brother in economy, Mme. de Maintenon wrote, in 1678, "If I had an income of fifty thousand crowns, I would not have the train of a great lady, nor a bed with lace curtains, like Mme. de La Fayette, nor a valet-de-chambre like Mme. de Coulanges. Can the pleasure they derive from these things outweigh the ridicule they excite?" I know not how many witticisms were expended on the laced bed of Mme. de La Fayette; but stretched upon it, as she too often was, she was certainly a simpler hearted person than her friend in the dead-leaf colored mantle, which to the last she affected. Finally, Mme. de Maintenon herself confesses there was an end of all amity between them. "I have not been able to keep the friendship of Mme. de La Fayette. She set too high a price upon it. But I have at least shown her that I was as sincere as she. It was the duke who made trouble between us. We had had before our trifling misunderstandings."¹ And in Mme. de La Fayette's *Memoirs* for the years 1688 and 1689 — apropos of the comedy of *Esther* — we read, "She (Mme. de Maintenon) ordered the poet to compose a comedy, but to choose a pious subject; for just now, at court as well as elsewhere, there is no

¹ A letter to Mme. de Saint-Géran, August, 1684. Who was the duke referred to? Was it the new Duke de la Rochefoucauld? We gather from a letter of Mme. de Maintenon to the same, dated April 6, 1679, that she hated the Marsillac, father and son.

salvation without piety. . . . The comedy represented, after a fashion, the fall of Mme. de Montespan and the elevation of Mme. de Maintenon, the only difference being that Esther was rather younger than the latter, and not quite so much of a *précieuse* in her religion." While quoting thus from two famous women, I find no pleasure in reproducing the bitterness which spoiled their long attachment. The truth is that Mme. de Maintenon, whose aggrandizement came last, changed by degrees towards Mme. de La Fayette, who always remained the same. It may be that the former would have preferred to have this perfectly uniform bearing alter a little with her own altered fortunes.¹ Mme. de La Fayette remained to the hour of her death the very woman of whom Mme. Scarron, writing to Mme. de Chantelou, in 1666, of her presentation to Mme. de Montespan, had said, "Mme. de Thianges presented me to her sister. . . . I described my misery, but without humbling myself; in short, Mme. de La Fayette was pleased with the sincerity of my expressions and the brevity of my narrative." Had I been M. Røderer I should have felt, and I should have maintained, that gentle and polished sociality attained its most satisfying triumph in the circle of Mme. de Sévigné and Mme. de La Fayette, rather than in the elevation and marriage of Mme. de Maintenon. The latter, in fact,

¹ La Beaumelle, in the Memoirs which precede his edition of Mme. de Maintenon's Letters, attributes to Mme. de La Fayette all manner of faults of character and ambitious longings to supersede Mme. de Sablé, while in reality it was the latter who alienated Mme. de La Fayette's friends and caused her house to be deserted. It would be impossible to imagine a more impertinent disregard of evidence than is evinced by this author.

did something of the same harm to polite manners that certain revolutionists have done to the cause of liberty, by carrying reform too far, and advocating those excesses which necessitate a reaction. It would have been well to stop short of prudery and rigidity, under penalty of provoking the regency.

In July, 1677, a year before the appearance of the *Princesse de Clèves*, the health of Mme. de La Fayette seemed as wretched as possible. Yet she had fifteen years before her of slow and uninterrupted decay, being "one of those who drain their miserable life to its latest drop." Nevertheless, it was during the following winter that she and M. de la Rochefoucauld put the finishing touches to that charming romance which was brought out by Barbin on the 16th of March, 1678.¹ Once more we encounter Segrais, who says, in one place, that he never took the trouble of replying to the criticisms called forth by this novel; and, elsewhere,

¹ In one of Mme. de Sévigné's letters to her daughter (March 16, 1672), we read, "I am in despair that you should have had Bajazet from any one but myself. It is all owing to that miserable Barbin, who hates me because I do not produce princesses of Cleves and Montpensier." The inference is, that the *Princesse de Clèves* must have been projected, and perhaps roughly outlined, at this early date, that it had been discussed among the author's most intimate friends, and that Mesdames de Sévigné and de Grignan had perhaps heard its opening chapters. From a letter — I think of Mlle. de Scudéry to Bussy — it is also evident that during the winter which preceded its publication, M. de la Rochefoucauld and Mme. de La Fayette were closeted and preparing something. The two statements, however, are easily reconciled. The Princess of Clèves remained a mere sketch from 1672 to 1677, at which time the author undertook to complete it with the assistance of M. de la Rochefoucauld.

that Mme. de La Fayette stooped so far as to refute them,—thus leaving room for some doubt as to the degree of his coöperation in the work. But, once for all, we decline to discuss this point. The book is so superior to anything which he ever wrote, that we cannot hesitate in the matter. This time, moreover, no misunderstanding occurred. The story of the private readings had gone abroad, and the book was received as the work of Mme. de La Fayette alone, assisted by the taste of M. de la Rochefoucauld. As soon as the Princess, who was thus heralded, appeared, she became the engrossing theme of conversation and correspondence. Bussy and Mme. de Sévigné wrote of her. Every one was on the *qui-vive* on her account. People met in the grand alley of the Tuileries and asked the latest news of her. Fontenelle read the story four times while it was yet new. Boursault made a tragedy of it as they make vaudevilles at the present day. Valincour produced, under strict incognito, a small critical volume, which was attributed to Father Bonhours, and the Abbé de Charnes refuted it in another small volume, supposed to be by Barbier d'Aucourt, a critic famous in those days, and a persistent adversary of Jesuistical spiritualism. The Princess of Cleves has survived this well-merited popularity, and remains the first, in point of time, of our most delightful fictions.

It is affecting to think of the circumstances which attended the birth of these pure and charming creations,—these noble and spotless characters,—the fresh, refined, and tender emotions which this book portrays;—how Mme. de La Fayette threw into it all that her gentle soul retained of its early and ever-cherished dreams, and M. de la Rochefoucauld recognized

in M. de Nemours that brilliant flower of chivalry which he himself had so misused — a kind of flattering mirror in which his own youth was renewed.¹ Thus these two old friends recurred in imagination to the primitive beauty of that age when they had not known each other, and therefore had not loved. The blush so familiar to Mme. de Clèves, and which is at first almost her only language, indicates the aim of the author, which is to depict love under its freshest, purest, vaguest, most adorable, most disquieting, most irresistible, — in a word, most characteristic aspect. We are constantly reminded of the dawn of beauty and youth combined; of that trouble and embarrassment manifest in every action when love invades the innocence of early youth, — of all, in short, which is furthest from her and her friend in their late connection. The tenor of her actual life was singularly rational. People used to tell her that she had more judgment even than intellect, and it was a compliment that she prized more than all others; but here a deep poetic sensibility obtained the mastery, although good sense was never wanting. Nowhere have the inconsistencies and the refined duplicity of love been so naturally described as in the Princess of Cleves. “Mme. de Clèves was at first a little sorry that M. de Nemours should have been allowed to suppose that it was he who had prevented her from going to Marshal de Saint-André’s. Afterwards she felt a kind of annoyance that her mother should have disabused

¹ “M. de la Rochefoucauld,” says the Abbé Longuerue, “was devoted to works of fiction as long as he lived. Every afternoon he and Segrais used to go to Mme. de La Fayette’s, and have a reading from *l’Astrée*. There was always, after all, a romantic corner in his heart.”

him of that belief." "Mme. de Clèves had strongly suspected that the prince perceived her tenderness for himself, and his words showed that she was not mistaken. It disturbed her greatly to find that she was not mistress of her emotions, and that she had betrayed them to the Chevalier de Guise. It had been the same in the case of M. de Nemours, but then a certain sweetness had blended with her chagrin." The scenes are appropriate, dramatic, sharply defined, in one or two cases only improbable, and even then redeemed by their peculiar interest and their slightly careless air. The episodes are never too distinct from the progress of the action, and sometimes even assist it. The most unlikely circumstance, — that of the pavilion, — where M. de Nemours arrives so very opportunely, and hears behind a paling the declaration made to Mme. de Clèves, — this scene, which is criticised both by Bussy and Valincour, did yet, if we may believe the latter, dissolve in tears those who had wept but once while perusing *Iphigénie*. For ourselves, who are not greatly shocked by these improbabilities, and who like even the old-fashioned coloring of the *Princesse de Clèves*, — what especially charms us is its subdued and marvelously delicate portraiture — the style, always quiet, and at times even dreamy, — the *few willows* bordering the brook along which the lover strays; the reticent description of the heroine's charms; "her hair gathered in a confused knot, and her eyes looking a *little larger* through her tears;" lastly, the allusion to that *somewhat brief life*, whereby our final impression of the book is so skilfully conveyed. The language, too, is delicious, exquisitely chosen, with negligences and irregularities that are full of grace, but which Va-

lineour notices in detail, and represents as condemned by a grammarian of his acquaintance, although he seems somewhat ashamed of bringing so direct a charge against so delightful a book. From these I select two idioms only, which have now become obsolete. "The king¹ did not long survive *the* prince, his son," and "My Lord Courtenay was also beloved by Queen Marie, who would have married him with the approbation of all England, but that she knew (*sans qu'elle connût*) that the youth and beauty of her sister Elizabeth moved him more than the prospect of a crown," instead of "had she not known," (*si ce n'est qu'elle connût*), &c. This last idiom occurs frequently.

Valincour's little volume, reprinted by Adry in his edition of the Princess of Clèves, is a remarkable specimen of that polished criticism in which writers of taste indulged under Louis XIV. Valincour was then but twenty-five years old. He cared little for the world of Huet and Segrais, and fairly represented the views of Racine and Boileau. The malicious humor which he always holds in check does not interfere with his fairness, or prevent him from awarding praise, although at times he descends to petty cavilling. Those who attributed his critique to Father Bonhours must have been amused to find the censor deploring the fact that

¹ A critic whom we like to quote has said, "It is a remarkable fact that the French language in its purity, as written by Mme. de Sévigné, Mme. de La Fayette, and M. de la Rochefoucauld, consisted of a very small number of words, which recur incessantly with an ever-varying charm, and that the expressions employed by these writers were extremely general. We may say of the style of Mme. de La Fayette in particular, that it is purity and transparency itself — the *liquida vox* of Horace."

the first meeting between M. de Clèves and Mlle. de Chartres should have taken place in a jeweller's shop rather than in a church. As a whole, however, the notice reveals a subtle, accurate, and finely ironical mind, such as M. de Fontanes might have consulted with pleasure and profit before passing judgment on Mme. de Staël. The Abbé de Charnes, who reviews this criticism word by word, and refutes it indignantly, seems to me like a provincial who had not asked of Mme. de La Fayette permission to defend her. Barbier d'Aucourt, though he had nought of Attic grace, would have managed the matter differently. In Valincour we find a complete theory of the historical novel, admirably set forth by a savant whom he introduces; and this theory is the very one which was afterwards partially realized by Sir Walter Scott.

Bussy, who, in his letters to Mme. de Sévigné, dwells at some length on the Princess of Clèves, spoils his remarks by observing, with inconceivable fatuity, "We are criticising persons of quality and genius. The printed notice is more accurate, and, in many places, more amusing" — a speech which should suffice to avenge Mme. de La Fayette of all the aspersions cast upon her by this presuming individual.¹

As the story of the Princess of Clèves advances, Mme. de La Fayette's thoughts return from their first excursion among the joys of youth, and her tone grows

¹ In vol. ii. p. 304 of Bayle's *Miscellaneous Works* there is a very pleasant notice of the *Princesse de Clèves*, which has been incorporated into the *Nouvelles Lettres Critiques sur l'Histoire de Calvinisme*. Bayle's critique is the very reverse of imaginative. He takes his stand on what has been called "a fine natural bluntness."

very grave. Her sense of duty strengthens, and becomes absorbing. The austere close of the book is strongly suggestive of "that long and near view of death which shows us the things of this world in a light so different from that in which we saw them when in health." In the summer of 1677 she had experienced this, and, as Mme. de Sévigné observes, had turned her thoughts towards the end. Her general disenchantment is evident from the fear which she attributes to Mme. de Clèves, that marriage will prove the grave of love to the prince, and open the door to jealousy. This fear has as much effect as her conscientious scruple in deterring Mme. de Clèves from a union with her lover. As they wound up their ideal romance, it is clear that these two friends, M. de la Rochefoucauld and Mme. de La Fayette, came to have doubts about the imaginary felicity of their beloved creations, and reverted to the sweetness of their own actual connection, as far more consolatory and more sure.

They were not to enjoy it much longer. During the night of the 16th of March, 1680, on the second anniversary of the publication of the *Princesse de Clèves*, M. de la Rochefoucauld died. "My head is so full of this misfortune, and of the extreme distress of our poor friend," writes Mme. de Sévigné, "that I can speak of nothing else. M. de Marsillac is inconceivably affected. Still, my child, he will go back to the king and the court; all his family is left him; but where will Mme. de La Fayette find such a friend, such companionship, or sweetness, tenderness, trust, and consideration for herself and her son equal to his? She is feeble. She is confined to her room, and sees nothing of the outside world. M. de la Rochefoucauld, too, was seden-

tary in his habits; their condition rendered them dependent on one another, and nothing ever equalled the charm of their friendship and their confidence in one another. Think of it, my daughter. You cannot imagine a more overwhelming loss, nor one for which time is less likely to console. I have not left my unfortunate friend in all these days. She would not intrude into that family, as if she had need of pity. Mme. de Coulanges has done very well, also, and we shall remain some time longer." And so on, in every succeeding letter. "Poor Mme. de La Fayette knows not what to do with herself. There is comfort for every one but her." This idea Mme. de Sévigné repeats in a thousand forms, each one more striking than the last. "The poor woman cannot so *close up her ranks* as to fill this vacant place." Mme. de La Fayette did not attempt to fill it. She knew that for such ruin there is no repair. Even the fond attachment of Mme. de Sévigné was not enough, and she felt it. The heart of the latter was too much divided. To understand the insufficiency of all such friendships, even the best and dearest, one need only read the letter of Mme. de La Fayette to Mme. de Sévigné, dated October 8, 1689, so imperious, so unstudied, so consummate in its tenderness, and then the commentary which Mme. de Sévigné makes upon it when writing to her daughter, "Mon Dieu! what a proposition! To break up my own establishment, be dependent, have no equipage, and owe a thousand crowns!" It is evident, when even the most delicate feel thus, that we must never expect too much of those friendships which are not unique and undivided. After love or an absolute friendship,—without alien association or mental reservation, all-

pervading, all-engrossing, and identical with ourselves, — nothing remains to us but death or God.

Mme. de La Fayette lived thirteen years longer. Trivial details of her outward life during those desert years may be found in *Mme. de Sévigné*. An ardent fancy which she conceived for young Mme. de Schomberg excited a singular jealousy among other and older friends; but this, her soul's apparent struggle for a new affection, seems not to have lasted long. It was, perhaps, in consequence of the same restless craving, that during the first months after her loss she caused her rooms, already so spacious, to be enlarged on the garden side, — enlarged, alas! in proportion as her existence dwindled. It would also appear that, to pass away the time, Mme. de La Fayette undertook the composition of certain works, some of which have been lost. The *Comtesse de Tende* must be referred to these years. The sharpest criticism of Bussy and the world in general, in the case of the *Princesse de Clèves*, had been directed against the extraordinary avowal made by the heroine to her husband. By inventing an analogous situation which should lead to a second and still more extraordinary acknowledgment, Mme. de La Fayette thought to justify the first. The Countess de Tende was successful, but a fuller development of the story would have been requisite to give the Princess de Clèves a sister worthy of herself. The *Memoirs of the Court of France* for the years 1688 and 1689 are remarkable for their continuity, their precision, and the artlessness of their narrative. There are no digressions, hardly any reflections, but a careful, rapid, vivid statement of facts, made with sustained ability. The author of such a work could not have wanted aptitude for

actual business. I have quoted her rather sharp remark about Mme. de Maintenon and *Esther*. Neither are Racine and his *Comédie de Couvent* very respectfully treated. "To divert her grandchildren and the king, Mme. de Maintenon has ordered a comedy of Racine, the first poet of the age, who has been taken from poetry, where he is inimitable, and transformed, unluckily for himself and those who love the theatre, into a very imitable historian." Mme. de La Fayette had been of those who long preferred Corneille to Racine. She had admired, and attempted in *Zayde*, the Spanish style, so dear to the author of the *Cid*, but which Racine and Boileau had attacked and demolished. She knew Fontenelle, and reckoned among her particular friends Segrais and Huet, who cherished an antipathy, and even a hatred, for the reigning poets. M. de la Rochefoucauld, who enjoyed them as writers, allowed them only one kind of talent, and found them tedious aside from their verses. Finally, Valincour, who had assailed the Princess of Clèves was the pupil and intimate friend of both. Yet Mme. de La Fayette had too much intellect and fairness of mind not to appreciate and admire authors whose refinement and precision were so akin to her own. Even at the moment when she is least respectful to Racine, she calls him our best poet and inimitable. We have seen that she listened to a reading of the *Poétique* of Despréaux, read at Gourville, — that is, at home.¹ Her sympathies, as

¹ Furthermore, Madame is known to have been the principal patroness, at court, of the new poets. Racine had dedicated his *Andromache* to her. Now, Mme. de La Fayette was Madame's adviser in all literary matters. Her influence at this decisive moment must have been direct and powerful. She merely judged those whom she had previously patronized.

we have said, were rather with Boileau, on account of his intellectual precision and soundness as a critic, and, like him, she was an oracle of good sense in her circle of the fashionable world. Numbers of her epigrammatic, Despréaux-like sayings have been preserved. We have quoted several, and shall add a few more; for instance, "He who exalts himself above others, demeans himself, however gifted he may be." "Do you know," said Boileau, one day, in the course of conversation with Olivet, "why the ancients have so few admirers? It is because three fourths of their translators have been either ignoramuses or fools. Mme. de La Fayette, the most intellectual woman and the best female writer in France, once compared a stupid translator to a lackey whom his mistress sends to pay a compliment. What the lady said in polished terms the servant mangles and repeats coarsely. The more delicate the compliment, the worse work he makes of it, — which is a perfect image of a bad translator." Boileau himself appears, in some sort, to acknowledge the resemblance which we have indicated between himself and Mme. de La Fayette. M. Røderer is abundantly justified in what he says of the relations of Molière with the world of Mesdames de Sévigné and de La Fayette, and in showing that the *Femmes Savantes* contained no allusion to them. As for La Fontaine, it is certain that at one time he was on terms of familiarity with Mme. de La Fayette. He sent her a small billiard-table, accompanied by some tender verses, which are still in existence. It must have been at nearly the same time that he dedicated a fable to the author of the *Maxims*, and another to Mme. de Sévigné.¹

¹ Mme. de La Fayette did, therefore, actually belong to the

After the death of M. de la Rochefoucauld, the thoughts of Mme. de La Fayette turned more and more towards heaven — a fact of which we have precious evidence in the long and beautiful letter addressed to her by Du Guet. She had chosen him for her director. Without being immediately connected with Port Royal, she inclined to that side, and her preference was strengthened by the hypocrisy of the court. Her mother, as we have seen, had given her for a step-father the Chevalier Renaud de Sévigné, one of the benefactors of *Port-Royal-des-Champs*, whose cloister he had caused to be rebuilt. His death did not occur till 1676.¹ Mme. de La Fayette had some acquaintance

same group, and, as it were, the same Parnassus, as La Fontaine, Racine, and Despréaux, and the ensuing anecdote merely conveys a somewhat childish image of the truth. "In 1695," says Ménage, "Mme. de Thianges gave, as a Christmas present, to the Duke du Maine, a miniature chamber, profusely gilded, about as large as an ordinary table. Above the door was engraved, in large letters, 'The Chamber of the Sublime.' Inside there was a raised platform, surrounded by a railing, and on it an arm-chair, in which was seated a striking likeness, in wax, of the Duke du Maine. He was handing some verses to M. de la Rochefoucauld for examination. On either side the chair were M. de Marsillac and M. Bossuet, who was then Bishop of Condom. At the other end of the recess were Mme. de Thianges and Mme. de La Fayette reading verses together. Outside the railing stood Despréaux with a pitchfork, holding at bay some seven or eight bad poets. Racine was beside Despréaux, and a little farther off stood La Fontaine, whom the former beckoned to advance. All these figures were in wax, and all the persons represented had furnished their own likenesses." Ménage does not inform us whether he had sat for one of the bad poets whom Boileau was driving away.

¹ Towards the last, Mme. de La Fayette's relations with Port Royal were more intimate than I at first supposed. In a letter

with Du Guet, who was becoming very celebrated as a spiritual guide, and who, during the decline of Port Royal, preserved its best and most characteristic traditions, but in no narrow or contentious spirit. I give some of the austere counsels addressed by this judicious priest to the penitent who had requested them.

"It has seemed to me, madame, that you ought usefully to occupy those first moments of the day when you cease to sleep, but only to begin to dream. I know there is then no connection in your thoughts, and that often you are merely striving not to think at all; but it is difficult to emancipate ourselves from our natural dispositions, especially when our desires are in accordance with them; and self-resumption is easy when self-renunciation may have been hard. It is, therefore, important for you to feed on more wholesome bread than those aimless thoughts, of which the most innocent are those which are simply useless; and my opinion would be, that you might best employ the

from Racine to M. de Bonrepaux, dated July 28, 1693, there is a passage which has never been printed, and which I shall transcribe from the original. He is speaking of a supper at the Countess de Grammont's, where were present Mme. de Caylus, Cavoye, Valincour, Despréaux, and Racine himself, and says, "We spoke of your friend Mme. de La Fayette—a theme of sorrowful interest. Unhappily, I had not the honor of seeing her during the last years of her life. By God's mercy her worldly avocations became distasteful to her, and she has died, after enduring in solitude and with noble resignation the sufferings attendant on her infirmities. She derived great support from the Abbé du Guet, and *some of the gentlemen from Port Royal*, whom she held in extreme veneration—a fact which, when mentioned, drew lavish encomiums of them from Mme. de Grammont, who is very enthusiastic about the place, and takes no pains to conceal it."

tranquil hours in question by reviewing your already long life, whereof nought is left you now but a reputation whose vanity you understand better than any other.

“Hitherto, the clouds in which you have essayed to shroud religion have concealed you from yourself. As it is through religion only that we can properly examine and understand ourselves, you, while affecting ignorance of religion, have been ignorant of your own heart alone. It is time to assign all things to their true places, and yourself to yours. Truth will judge you, and you are in the world merely to obey, and not to judge, truth. In vain we excuse ourselves; in vain we dissimulate. The veil is rent; the world and its lusts vanish, and we become convinced of our need of leading a new life, just as life itself is withdrawn. We must begin, therefore, with the sincere desire of seeing ourselves as we are seen by our Judge. The sight is an overwhelming one even for those who are most strenuous in their hatred of disguises. It strips us of all our virtues, and even of all our amiable qualities, as well as of the esteem which they had won for us. We feel that we have lived thus far in delusion and a lie; that we have fed on painted viands; that we have known nought of virtue save the adjustment of its draperies; and that we have utterly neglected its substance, for that substance is to refer everything to God and salvation, and thoroughly to despise ourselves, not through a wiser vanity than ours of old, and a pride more enlightened and in better taste, but through a full realization of our own wretchedness and ill-desert.”

The rest of the letter is equally admirable, and in the same appropriate and urgent tone; thus, “You

who have dreamed, dream no more! You who have deemed yourself singularly truthful, and whom the world flattered as such, you were not so! you were but half true and half false! Your godless wisdom was simple good taste!" And then there is a word about "those years of which we have not yet sincerely repented, because we are so unfair as to excuse our own weakness, and still to love the one who caused them."¹

One year before her death Mme. de La Fayette wrote a short note to Mme. de Sévigné, in which she described her uninterrupted suffering by day and night, and expressed her resignation to the will of God. She closes thus: "Believe me, my dearest, I have loved you more truly than any one else in the world." Was then that other attachment, which she no longer named or heeded, quite buried, consumed in sacrifice?

It is the same story of patient acquiescence to the end. On the 3d of June, 1693, just after the fatal day, Mme. de Sévigné, writing to Mme. Guitaud, bewails the death of one who had been her friend for forty years. "Her infirmities during the last two years have been extreme. I always defended her, but people said she was notional and would not go out. She was also mortally sad. 'What nonsense!' still cried the world. 'Is she not the most fortunate woman on earth?' But to those who judged her thus hastily I used to say, Mme. de La Fayette is not notional; of this I am sure. Alas! madame, the poor lady is now

¹ Du Guet in his youth had attempted a romance of the heart, and had been very fond of *l'Astrée*. He was precisely the best possible director for the Princess de Clèves.

more than justified. She had two polypi in the heart, and the extremity of that organ was withered. Is not this enough to have caused the agonies of which she used to complain? In life, in death, and at all times, she was under the guidance of that divine reason which was her distinguishing trait. She was unconscious throughout the four days of her last illness. We are comforted, however, by the thought that God vouchsafed her one peculiar grace, which would seem to indicate a genuine predestination. On the day before Corpus Christi she confessed with the precision and depth of feeling characteristic of herself, and received Our Lord in the same manner. And we, my dear madame, regard this communion (she always partook at Whitsuntide) as a mark of God's mercy, and some consolation for the fact that she was not in a condition to receive the viaticum."

Thus lived and died, between sorrowful sweetness and acute suffering, worldly wisdom and penitence before God, a woman, the work of whose imagination still enchants us. Shall we add aught by way of reflection or admonition? The letter to Mme. de Sablé, the *Princesse de Clèves*, and the letter of Du Guet, — do not these things constitute a life?

SEPTEMBER 1, 1836.

III.

MADAME DE SOUZA.

A FRIEND who, after having seen much of the world, has withdrawn from it almost entirely, and who judges from a distance, and as it were from the shore, the swift whirlpool in which the rest of us are tossing, lately wrote me, apropos of certain rapid estimates I had made of contemporary works, "What you say of our 'sublimities' interests me extremely. Sublime they assuredly are. What they lack is calm and freshness, a little pure cold water wherewith to cool our burning palates." This quality of freshness and delicacy, this limpidity in emotion and sobriety in speech, this soft and quiet shading, as they disappear on all hands from actual life and the works of imagination now produced, become all the more precious when we encounter them in obscurity, and in those pleasing compositions where they were last reflected. It would be a mistake to suppose that there is aught of weakness or degeneracy in regretting these vanished charms—these flowers which apparently could only blow in the very last days of an order of society now passed away. The softly-tinted pictures of which we speak presuppose a degree of taste and soul-culture which democratic civilization could not have abolished without detriment to itself, if something analogous thereto were not one day to reappear in our

modern manners. Modern society, when it shall have become a little more settled and better defined, will also have its element of repose, its cool, mysterious nooks, its shades favorable to refined sentiment, a few tolerably ancient forests, a few undiscovered fountains. It will admit into its seemingly uniform framework a thousand varieties of thought, and many a rare form of interior life: otherwise it will be, in one respect, far inferior to the civilization which preceded it, and will barely satisfy the needs of a whole family of souls. In stirring times, in moments of incoherent and confused inauguration like the present, it is natural to make for the most important point, to busy one's self with the general working, and everywhere, even in literature, to strike boldly, aim high, and shout through trumpets and speaking-tubes. The modest graces will, perhaps, come back after a while, and come with an expression appropriate to their new surroundings. I would fain believe it; but while hoping for the best, I feel sure that it will not be to-morrow that their sentiments and their speech will once more prevail. Meanwhile, we realize our need, and suffer from it. We betake ourselves, in hours of *ennui*, to the perfumes of the past — a past but of yesterday, which, nevertheless, will not return. And this is why I sat down the other morning and re-read *Eugène de Rothelin* and *Adèle de Sénange*, and why I speak of them to-day.

A young girl issuing for the first time from the convent where her whole childhood had been passed; — a handsome, elegant, sentimental lord, such as used to frequent Paris about the year 1780, who encounters her with a slight degree of embarrassment, and appears to her from the first in the light of a savior; — a very

old husband, good, sensible, paternal, never ridiculous, who marries the maiden solely to emancipate her from an egotistical mother, and secure to her fortune and a future; — all the simplest every-day occurrences among these three beings, who, by a natural concurrence of events, are led to the resolve never to separate while the old man lives; — scenes in the park or garden, sails, chats about the arm-chair, calls at the old convent, visits to old playmates, innocent and varied prattle, — jesting, tender, or crossed with gleams of passion; generosity mingling with the growth of love and blessing it; then, for fear of a too uniform sweetness, the world sketched in profile for a background, and its crimes and follies indicated; more than one original, more than one fool, identified in passing by some amusing feature; in a word, the actual life of a select circle; — a gathering passion which steals along like the streams of Neuilly under curtains of verdure, lingering and meandering deliciously; passing storms, like April rains, that leave no ravages; and all managed to the last and in the least particular with an ease that never verges on freedom, with a nobleness of tone that never forces nature, with a spirit of kindly allowance that is never indelicate; — such are the chief merits of a book whose harmony is unmarred by a single discordant word. The life and soul of it is the genius of Adèle — a genius winning, gay, versatile, winged like a bird, capricious and natural, timid and sensitive, roseate in its modesty, faithful, passing from smiles to tears with all the ardor of childhood.

We were on the eve of the revolution when this charming book was written. The author published it in London, in '93, amid calamity and privation. This

Adèle de Sénange appeared in her festal robes, as a maiden of Verdun, escaped from the massacre, and ignorant of the fate of her companions.

Mme. de Souza, then Mme. de Flahaut, had been educated at a convent in Paris, and had married in extreme youth the Count de Flahaut, who was already fifty-seven years old. The convent is doubtless the one described in *Adèle de Sénange*. It had an adjacent hospital and a few very sage *pensionnaires*; and her reward of merit used to be to go to this hospital every Monday evening, wait on the paupers, and read prayers with them. She lost her parents early, and memories of the convent were home memories for her. This early education influenced, as we shall see, her whole line of thought, and supplied vivid images for all her works. Married and lodging at the Louvre, she owed the idea of writing to the *ennui* induced by those political discussions which became more and more animated as the revolution drew near. She was too young, she said, to have a fancy for such things, and she desired to create an inner world for herself. In the romance of *Emilie et Alphonse*, the Duchess de Candale, then newly married, writes to her friend, Mlle. d'Astey, "I have made me a little retreat in one corner of my room. Here I have arranged a single chair, my piano and harp, a few books, a pretty table, on which are my sketches and my writing, and have drawn a kind of imaginary circle, which separates me from the rest of the apartment. If people come to see me, I hasten to overstep my barrier, that no one may penetrate within it; and when any one chances to approach my asylum, I can hardly contain my vexation. I cannot away with him." Mme. de Flahaut, in her chamber at the

Louvre, must have made herself a retreat similar to Mme. de Candale's; but in her isolation she had an intimacy ready made. If any one attempted to cross her imaginary barrier by speaking to her of politics, she replied that M. de Sénange had had an attack of the gout, which occasioned her great anxiety. In *Eugénie et Mathilde*, where she has described the effect produced upon a noble family by the early events of the revolution, we may be allowed to attribute to herself some portion of the sentiments of Mathilde, who declares herself fatigued (*ennuyée*), though not distressed (*désolée*), by the excesses of the revolution.¹ *Adèle de Sénange* was, therefore, written without literary pretence, and merely as a private pastime. Yet, one day, the author, yielding to a confiding impulse, raised her ideal barrier, and proposed to a friend to make arrangements for a reading before a small number of persons. The offer thus made was not accepted. People were willing to allow her an interesting mind, but not the talent of an author. So *Adèle de Sénange* failed to gain hearers, and we know that Paul and Virginia obtained them with difficulty.

The revolution developed its phases in rapid succession, and Mme. de Flahaut quitted Paris, and, after the 2d of September, France. M. de Flahaut was imprisoned, and soon fell a victim. By dint of gold and diamonds, lavished by the family and friends outside

¹ Rather minute details of the life and sentiments of Mme. de Flahaut during this period may be found in the Memorial of the American Gouverneur Morris, who arrived in Paris in February, 1780, and very soon obtained an introduction to her. (See vol. i. of the French edition, pp. 236, 241, 249, 257, and especially 250.)

upon the jailers, he had succeeded in making his escape, and was living in a safe retreat. But some one told in his presence that his advocate had been imprisoned on suspicion of having afforded him an asylum, and M. de Flahaut, in order to justify the innocent, quitted his hiding-place at six in the morning, and repaired to the Commune, where he lodged information against himself, and a few days later was guillotined. On the death of Robespierre Mme. de Flahaut quitted England with her son, and repaired to Switzerland, hoping even then to return to France; but the obstacles were not removed.¹ Ever roaming about in the vicinity of that forbidden France, she made it her home at Hamburg, and it was in that city that the celebrity she had won by *Adèle de Sénange* procured her the acquaintance of M. de Souza, whom she married in 1802. In the interval she had published *Emile et Alphonse*, in 1799, and *Charles et Marie*, in 1801.

Charles et Marie is a graceful, touching little English romance, somewhat in the style of Miss Burney. The landscape of parks and English cottages, the manners, the absurdities of hunting ladies and learned ladies, the pure and languishing sentiment, make up a com-

¹ The Memorial of Gouverneur Morris, already cited, gives some very curious particulars of the residence of Mme. de Flahaut in Switzerland. We behold her, in several of her letters, the active and influential counsellor of a young prince who has since become a king — Louis Philippe. She travelled with him from Bremgarten, in Switzerland, to Brunswick, and made haste to rejoin him at Hamburg. (French edition, vol. i. pp. 449-458.) After the revolution of 1830, whenever any allusion was made to the Tuileries, where her son was in high favor, Mme. de Souza took care delicately to hint that she herself did not go there.

plete picture, which shows how naïve an inspiration the author had derived from her residence in England. An ingenious, and, in the matter of subtilty at least, a competent critic, M. Patin,¹ in passing judgment upon Mme. de Souza, gives his decided preference to this pretty novel of *Charles et Marie*. I, too, like it, but not with the same degree of partiality. There is (if I may venture to say so), as in Miss Burney's own stories, too great a profusion of vague tints, soft even to effeminacy, — a pale, blonde coloring. Mme. de Souza usually draws better, and with a greater variety of color. It is in *Charles et Marie* that we find that ingenious remark so often quoted — “The faults on which we plume ourselves are like ugliness in full dress. They are seen in the strongest possible light.” If Mme. de Flahaut's journey to England, and the sky and scenery of that country, imparted a milky, misty hue to this romance of *Charles et Marie*, we find in *Eugénie et Mathilde*, which did not appear until 1811, an equally striking reflex of nature in the north, of the shores of Holland, and the roadsteads of the Baltic, where she lingered so long in exile. “Verdure in the northern latitudes has a peculiar tint, a uniform and tender hue, which comes by degrees to soothe and calm one. This aspect, producing no surprise, leaves the soul unmoved — a condition which has its charms, especially, perhaps, when one is unhappy. Sitting in the fields, the sisters yielded to protracted reverie, and lost themselves in idle thought, until, without having been diverted, they returned composed.” And a little farther on: “M. de Revel, hoping to divert the minds of his family, took

¹ *Répertoire de Littérature*, and afterwards in his *Miscellanies*, 1840.

pains to make them admire the rich pasture-lands of Holstein, and the fine trees along the shores of the Baltic, — that sea whose pallid waters differ in no respect from those of the numerous lakes which adorn the country, the evergreen turf reaching to the very water's edge. They were struck with that look of strangeness which Nature wears to all of us in countries far remote from those which gave us birth. The smiling perspective of the Lake of Ploën made them, somehow, breathe more freely. Possessing nothing of their own, they learned, like the poor, to find their recreation in a walk, their reward in a beautiful day; to enjoy, in short, the blessings bestowed on all." Mme. de Souza does not often pause to describe nature. She does it here with the more enjoyment, in that a profound and consoling memory mingles with her words. The laughing Adèle de Sénange, who knew only the alleys of Neuilly and the poplars of its island, is well nigh transformed, beside the Baltic, into a sister of the dreamy Valérie.

And, in fact, among those romantic conceptions which have become living realities, Adèle de Sénange is a sister worthy of Valérie, as she is of Mlle. de Clermont and the Princess de Clèves, and as Eugène de Rothelin is the noble brother of Adolphe, Edouard, Lépreux, and that Chevalier des Grieux, so fragile, and yet so easily pardoned. I omit the great René, in the solitude of his prééminence. Happy he, who, drawing either from himself or his surroundings, from memory or from imagination, shall create a being worthy the society of those whom I have named! shall add an unlooked-for brother or sister to that family which is loved even more than it is admired! He will not wholly die.

Eugène de Rothelin, published in 1808, is considered by some excellent judges the most exquisite of Mme. de Souza's works, superior even to *Adèle de Sénange*. If it were needful to decide and choose between works almost equally fascinating, we should indeed be seriously embarrassed; for if *Eugène de Rothelin* represents the talent of Mme. de Souza in the utmost perfection of its skill, *Adèle de Sénange* reveals the stream nearest its source, in its most natural, and, so to speak, its gladdest outgushing. Yet, in respect of consummate art, power of composition, nice observation, invention, and description, *Eugène* is a greater achievement than *Adèle*. To apply to the present case what I have elsewhere had occasion to say of the author of *Indianna* and *Valentine*, any moderately refined and sensitive soul who should dare to write unaffectedly possesses the material for a good romance. Taking our actual situation for a groundwork, and slightly disguising or modifying its accessories, we have at once the means of interesting ourselves, as if in the preparation of confidential memoirs, and of inducing others to share our interest. The difficulty lies in making a second effort, after the first has been so tender; after one has breathed, under a more or less treacherous disguise, a secret which exhaled perfume as it passed away. The life of Adèle de Sénange is divided into two periods: the convent where she was reared and was happy for years, and a marriage, also happy, although unequal in point of age. In *Eugène de Rothelin* the author abandons the semi-personal conception which touches her heart so nearly. We have no more a simple picture of youth and morning, where many a common trait is unconsciously revealed, and fixed in living colors upon the canvas.

Here is a firmer and more finished outline, a subject less identified with the author. There is no lack of tenderness, but observation of the world occupies a larger space. Sentiment and irony are balanced by means of skilfully-managed half-tints. The ingenuous passion — coquettish at times, but always captivating — of Athénaïs and Eugène is relieved against a background of harassing mystery. Even when it gleams along the garden terraces or the glazed corridor, of a sunny morning, we dread the absent M. de Rieux, wherever he may be, or catch a glimpse of the austere and sorrowful figure of the father of Eugène; and if we return to the drawing-room, the tenderness of the two lovers is diverted, and wreathes with doubtful grace the arm-chair of the charming but terrible old *maréchale*, who jokes and laughs and propounds questions about happiness — a kind of unguarded La Bruyère.

Marie Joseph Chénier has briefly eulogized Mme. de Souza, in words characterized by his own precision and elegance, and specially applicable to Eugène. "These pretty romances," he says, "do not, it is true, represent the development of great passions; neither must we look in them for any deep study of humanity at large: but we are at least sure of finding here the most subtle social perceptions, pictures true to the life and delicately finished, a style moderately ornate, the correctness of a good book with the ease of eloquent conversation, the intellect which says nothing commonplace, and the taste which says nothing superfluous." But, apart from these general encomiums, which are applicable to a whole class of literary artists, it should be said of *Eugène de Rothelin* that it portrays one side

of a century, and that a brilliant, chaste, poetic side, and one which we sometimes fail to recognize. Under this aspect the graceful romance is no longer an individual and isolated work. It acquires a higher, or, at least, a wider, significance.

The mind and genius of Mme. de Souza belong wholly to the eighteenth century. She observed it very closely, and loved its society, its tone, its customs, its culture, its nicely-apportioned life. We do not examine the influence upon her of Jean Jacques, or any other noted writer of that stamp, as we do in the case of Mme. de Staël, Mme. de Krüdener, Mme. Cottin, or Mme. de Montolieu. Mme. de Flahaut was less of the nineteenth century than they; less carried away by enthusiasm towards unknown regions. Society and the world were her teachers. She trained herself to see and feel within definite limits. There grew up in the last half of the reign of Louis XIV., under the special influence of Mme. de Maintenon, a school of politeness, of self-restraint, of decorous prudence even in youthful passions, of mild but unlimited authority in old age. People were pious, they were worldly, they were witty; but all was regulated and softened by conventionalism. We may follow the footsteps of this illustrious dynasty, from Mme. de Maintenon, Mme. de Lambert, Mme. du Deffand (after her reformation), Mme. de Caylus, and the young girls who enjoyed Esther at Saint-Cyr, down to the Maréchale de Beauvau,¹ who seems to have been the original of the

¹ It was certainly she, and not the Maréchale de Luxembourg, as erroneously stated in the first volume of the *Memoirs of Mme. de Créquy*, who was the original of the portrait of Mme. d'Estouteville.

Maréchale d'Estouteville in *Eugène de Rothelin*, and that Marquise de Créquy, who, we are told, died a centenarian, and whose Memoirs, I strongly suspect, have slightly suffered at the hands of a certain man of genius.¹ Mme. de Flahaut, who was young when the century died, preserved this very portion of the inheritance she derived from it, modified indeed by her own good taste, and adapted to the new court in which she was to live.

Others have depicted the eighteenth century under its cynical or stormy aspects, its incongruities and irregularities. Voltaire has scoffed at it; Jean Jacques has extolled and underrated it by turns; Diderot, in his correspondence, makes us admire it as a brilliant and magnificent medley; Crébillon *fils* sets forth its ultra refinement of speech and its real licentiousness; the author of *Eugène de Rothelin* paints for us the age itself in its exquisite flower, its ideal and harmonious splendor. *Eugène de Rothelin* is, as it were, the romance of eighteenth-century chivalry; what *Tristan le Léonois* and other romances of the thirteenth century were to the chivalry of that day; what *Le petit Jehan de Saintré* or *Galaor* were to the fifteenth;

¹ In a passage of doubtful friendliness, the author of these Memoirs, speaking of that exquisite tone of the great world which he cannot deny to the author of *Adèle de Sénange*, expresses a degree of astonishment at its presence which is singular and wholly misplaced as regards Mme. de Flahaut. But even if the grounds of this judgment on the part of the author of the Memoirs were not visibly exaggerated, his surprise would be none the less unaccountable; for, in my opinion, one can never be in a condition to observe this same world to better purpose, to appreciate and depict it more nicely, than when, without exactly belonging to it, one has early taken one's place there.

—that is, a likeness, idealized and flattered, but a likeness still. Any well-born man of that day might have taken Eugène for his model. He is a Sir Charles Grandison without mawkishness or *ennui*. He has not, as yet, quite arrived at the dignity of that slightly solemn portrait which represents the *maréchale's* idea of what he was to be at twenty-five—a portrait in the style of Mlle. de Montpensier. Eugène, amid the world of amenities and conventionalities, has his jealousies, his ebullitions of mirth, his passing follies. One day he had almost compromised his sweet friend Athénaïs by his ill-humor at play. “What!” says she to him, the next day, “distress me, and, what is worse, risk breaking your word? Eugène in the wrong? I would not have believed it!” Eugène, then, has his faults, and Athénaïs her imprudences; but these render them only the more lovable. Nobody moralizes but the *maréchale*; and she does it with a tact that is almost always successful. Athénaïs and Eugène are caprice and poesy,—not easily rendered amenable to rules, but becoming obedient in the end, and able to soften their master. When, in the last scene, *in one of those straight alleys where one can be seen at so great a distance*, Mme. d’Estouteville advances slowly, leaning on the arm of Eugène, all is summed up for me in this single picture. If ever author succeeded in uniting the thoughtfulness of the moralist to the animation of the painter, and raising romance to the level of poetry, it has been accomplished in *Eugène de Rothelin*.¹ What if, in the char-

¹ This very name of Rothelin—so graceful and easily pronounced—recalls one branch of the descendants of the valiant Dunois. The Abbé de Rothelin, the tender and faithful friend of Polignac, was of this family.

acterization of her charming hero, the author supposed herself to be presenting a model for imitation, while the present generation is no longer disposed so to regard it? She succeeded in drawing from a recent past a type of character never before acknowledged or perceived — a type which completes and adorns the memory of that past. The spirit of Eugène was invoked in the quatrains of Mme. d'Houdetot.

After *Eugène de Rothelin*, there still remain to be noticed two romances of Mme. de Souza, more prolix than the masterpieces we have mentioned, but, nevertheless, excellent compositions — *Eugénie et Mathilde* and the *Comtesse de Fargy*. The convent plays a conspicuous part in these two tales, as we have already seen it in *Adèle de Sénange*. There was, in short, a more important item in the life and thought of Mme. de Souza than the facts of her having read Jean Jacques and La Bruyère, beheld the French revolution, suffered as an *émigrée*, and assisted at the pomps of the empire, — her education, namely, in a convent. I would venture to affirm that no circumstance in her career had a more lasting significance than this; none furnished so steadfast a groundwork for her dreams. The religion and morals of her books are strict and pure; yet she seldom regards the cloister on its fervent and mystical side. She sees in it little of the contrite expiation of the Héloïses and the La Vallières. The author of *Lelia*, who was also reared in a convent, and who received a deep impression from her training, has rendered with very different expression the pious tranquillity of such a home. But, as I have said, the author of the *Comtesse de Fargy* and *Eugénie et Mathilde* actually belongs, by her tastes, to the

eighteenth century. To her the convent is something gay, gracious, and romantic, like Saint-Cyr — an aviary of friendly doves, filled, as a rule, with the inquisitive chatter of volatile innocence. “That portion of the garden which they pompously denominate the wood is only a cluster of trees before a very minute house, wholly separate from the convent, although enclosed by its walls. But the *religieuses* have a way of pleasing themselves by giving great names to their little possessions. Accustomed to privation, the least things are considerable in their eyes.” Such are the convents of Blanche and Eugénie. Yet in Eugénie’s, at the time of the dispersion of the communities by the revolution, there were eloquent scenes; and that despoiled prioress who joyfully profits by the retreat of Eugénie to rule the house, if only for a day, is a well-studied character.

Two elements are blended in the *Comtesse de Fargy* — observation, experience, and the conflict with obstacles, as illustrated by Mme. de Nançay and her old friend, M. de Entrague, and the sentimental story of the Marquis de Fargy and his father. The latter pleases me least; and, in general, aside from *Eugène de Rothelin* and *Adèle de Sénange*, the development of sentiment in the tales of Mme. de Souza is not as original as the moral observations and the piquant discourse. These specimens of handsome, melancholy young persons, like the Marquis de Fargy, and, elsewhere, the Spaniard Alphonse and Ladislás the Pole, in *Eugénie et Mathilde*, easily fall into mere romanticism, while the rest is real life portrayed with the most delicate truth. In the connection between the venerable M. d’Entrague and Mme. de Nançay, Mme. de

Souza has essayed to depict one of those friendships of the olden time which endured for half a century, and ended only with life. A woman, when she left her convent, was at once married, from motives of pure expediency; but the needs of her heart soon asserted themselves, and then she proceeded consciously and deliberately to form a single permanent tie. This, at least, was the order where expediency reigned, and in that ideal of the eighteenth century which was not, it must be confessed, universally accepted. The amiable M. d'Entrague, perpetually scolded by Mme. de Nançay, and as constantly flattered by Blanche, who finds herself involuntarily subserving every one of his ends, is a person whom we have known and loved, although the species is well nigh extinct. Mme. de Nançay is alive also, captious but kindly — one who can be influenced by a little manœuvring, without herself suspecting it. “Mme. de Nançay reëntered the house disposed to quarrel with everybody. She knew well enough that she was a little irritable; for, in a life where we have had repeated experience of ourselves, if we do not know ourselves perfectly, we at least have our suspicions.”

Eugénie et Mathilde, which we have already quoted, is the longest and best sustained of Mme. de Souza's productions, always excepting *Eugène* and *Adèle*. Here we have a complete picture of the inner life of a noble family during the years of the revolution. Eugénie, who has been forced to quit her convent, and who becomes a kind of tutelary angel to her family, constantly attracts and detains the gaze by her meek figure, her long black robe, her gauze-veiled tresses, and the great abbess's cross which she wears so worthily. There is

a very fine suggestion of sentiment where she goes out into the park to breathe the fresh air of the autumn morning, carrying in her arms her sister's child, little Victor; and when the baby clings to her neck, and nestles up to her face to avoid the cold, she feels in her heart the vague stirrings of maternal tenderness, at the very moment when Count Ladislas meets her. It is not for words to express these dim thrills of Eugénie's; melody alone could translate them.¹

¹ Here follows what M. Sainte-Beuve calls "a sketch of that virginal air," which he "offers to some graceful composer," and of which the following is an inadequate version. TR.

Sleep, precious one! 'Tis sweet to feel anew
 Thy little hand along my bare neck gliding,
 Thy little forehead in my bosom hiding;
 Sleep, precious one! I am thy mother too!

Thine own poor mother, love, is suffering
 Such terror for her Edmund, thou must know,
 Gone from him whither honor bade him go,
 To give his life, if need be, for his king.

Lay thy soft hand upon my neck anew;
 Sleep, precious one! I am thy mother too!

Can so much sorrow, then, dissolve in peace,
 Beneath the bright smile of the misty morn,
 And warmth of new-born sun-rays, at each turn
 Rekindling where they died among the trees?

Lay thy soft hand on my bare neck anew;
 Sleep, precious one! I am thy mother too!

Given into my tender care, it seems,
 How comes it, then, dear, that thine innocent lips
 Call forth my sighs, and that my spirit slips
 Backward, allured by long forgotten dreams?

Awake, my own! I know not what I fear:
 Too fond, too close the little hands are gliding;
 Too warm the head within my bosom hiding;
 For I am not thy mother, O my dear!

In *Eugénie et Mathilde* Mme. de Souza has revealed her own personality more fully than in any other work. There is one page which I can never read without emotion, and which I beg leave to quote in illustration of her character. It contains the heart-cry of many a mother under the empire, which Mme. de Souza, thinking of herself and her son, could not suppress. Mme. de Revel, who is secretly unhappy, begins to compassionate those mothers who have only daughters, because, as soon as these are married, they are separated from their families in interest and name. For the first time since the birth of Mathilde, she regrets that she never had a son. "Fool!" cries Mme. de Souza, interrupting the narrative; "for then would her sorrows have been heavier, and her anxieties more sharp. Poor mothers! your infant sons absorb all your thoughts,

For every faithful heart some vow, some word;
Honor for Edmund, Edmund for Mathilde;
But is this I, with sighs and yearnings filled
Of earthly love—a maiden of the Lord?

Awake! thy light touch from my neck remove;
For I am not thy mother, O my love!

Can I feel baby-kisses undefiled?
With vague oblivion soothe my lonely lot?
Or, even in my dreams, see—and sin not—
The frequent vision of the Holy Child?

Awake! thy light touch from my neck remove;
For I am not thy mother, O my love!

But no: the Father of the fatherless
Is not so cruel, will not thus ensnare
His exiled handmaid in this garden fair,
Ruth's God and Rachel's, in her dire distress.

Sleep on, my love! Once more 'tis sweet to feel
Thy little hand along my bare neck gliding,
Thy little forehead in my bosom hiding:
Sleep on, my child! I am thy mother still!

embrace all your future; but just as you fancy that you are rewarded for your years of care, they escape you. Their active youth, their foolish passions, transport and lead them astray: you are smitten with an anguish hitherto unknown.

“Poor mothers! you have a heart-throb for their every emotion. The child of yesterday has to-day become a man: he wants to be free. He thinks he is his own master: he essays to go forth into the world alone. Until he have purchased his experience, until you hear him coming back, there will be no more sleep for your eyes. You will wake long before him, but never betray the fond anxieties of your indefatigable affection. By many a subterfuge, by many a spell, it will be needful to conceal your surveillance over that young and independent creature.

“Henceforth everything will agitate you. Scan the features of the man in power, to see whether or no your son have compromised his own fortune and promotion. Watch the faces of the frivolous women who smile on him: see that he is not betrayed by a false or unhappy love.

“Poor mothers! you are no longer your own. Always preoccupied, answering with an absent air, your watchful ear catches the words let fall by your son in the next room. His voice rises; the conversation becomes warm. Perhaps he has made an implacable enemy or a dangerous friend, or involved himself in a mortal quarrel. All this first year you know, though he knows it not, that his happiness, his life, are at stake every instant and at every step. Poor mothers, poor mothers! you can only advance with trembling!

“He is going into the army! Ineffable grief! cease-

less, restless, heart-rending anxiety! And yet, if, after his first campaign, he return from the tumult of the camp eager for glory, and yet satisfied with your peaceful dwelling; if he is still frank and kindly to your old servants, gay and attentive to your old friends; if his open look, his child-like smile, his watchful and deferential tenderness, make you feel that he loves to be near you, — O happy, happy mother!" This was printed in 1811; and it is said that Bonaparte read portions of the book, and did not like it.¹

We will not speak of Mme. de Souza's other works — *Mlle. de Tournon* and the *Duchesse de Guise*; not

¹ He changed his mind, however. Returning from Berlin, on one occasion, Mme. de Souza went to Saint Cloud to see the Empress Josephine. The emperor was on the steps, impatient to be off hunting. The fiery horses were stamping at the foot of the flight. He was vexed at the sight of a woman, thinking that she would detain the empress, for whom he was waiting. He approached Mme. de Souza with a sufficiently sombre brow, and, recognizing her, said brusquely, "Ah! you are from Berlin. Well, are they fond of France there?" She saw the ill-humor on the brow of the terrible sphinx. "If I say, Yes," she thought to herself, "he will say, 'She is a fool;' and if I say, No, he will think me insolent." "Yes, sire," she replied; "they are fond of France as old women are fond of young ones." The emperor's face brightened. "Very good, very good!" he exclaimed twice, and as if congratulating her on her escape from the snare. As for Mme. de Souza, she was rewarded by his glorious smile, and liked to adduce this incident as a proof that familiarity with the world, and the habit of expressing one's thoughts, help to make the latter apposite; "for," said she, "that answer of mine was so entirely involuntary, and almost unconscious, that I was tempted to turn round upon the spot, to see if some one had not whispered it to me."

that they are by any means wanting in subtilty and grace, but because in them the historical issue is complicated by moral observations, which come between the reader and the book, and, for us, spoil its effect. In *Mlle. de Tournon* we have the development of a touching incident related in the Memoirs of Margaret of Valois. The author of *Cinq-Mars* is the only writer of our time who has succeeded in harmonizing the truthful portraiture of an epoch with the glow of romantic sentiment. People were less critical in the days of the *Princesse de Clèves*, or even at the time when *Mlle. de Clermont* appeared. We cannot complain. Suppose this charming novel had, unhappily, not been executed; could it be so much as attempted, now that we have read, in the spiteful, conjuring book of the Princess Palatine, "The duchess's three daughters are the handsomest girls that ever lived. The so-called Mlle. de Clermont is the most beautiful, but I think her sister, the Princess de Conti, is more amiable. The duchess can drink a great deal without losing her wits, and her daughters would fain imitate her; but they soon become intoxicated, and cannot control themselves like their mother." O, blessed ignorance of history, innocence of primitive romance-writers! where are ye?

Those who have the honor of Mme. de Souza's acquaintance find in her that supreme good-breeding which she has so well described; none of those unnecessary and widely-aimed words which are too common in our day; clear and definite turns of expression; a skilful yet simple arrangement of thought; brilliancy without pretension; remarks which haunt the memory;

something, in short, of what constituted the distinctive character of the eighteenth century, from Fontenelle to the Abbé Morellet, but with a touch of sentiment peculiarly feminine. Moralist of the heart's secret places, she has small faith in the mighty progress of the present. She would be severe on many of our noisy youthful notions, if her genial and indulgent spirit were capable of severity. The author of *Eugène de Rothelin* has, as may be imagined, small taste for times of agitation and violent debate. A friend who inquired, in 1814, her opinion of the real state of France, judging otherwise than by the newspapers, received this reply: that the condition of France resembled a book open in the middle, which the ultras were reading backward, from right to left, in the attempt to return to the beginning, while the liberals were rushing through it from left to right, eager to reach the end, but whose actual open page no one was perusing. How else could the Maréchale d'Estouteville have spoken of our times?

An injurious epigraph having been inadvertently attributed to her in a recent work, Mme. de Souza wrote this model rectification, which reveals her whole character: "Monsieur has been betrayed into an error. The saying in question was accredited to a certain literary man, whose name, though he is long since dead, I will not permit myself to mention. For myself, I never either penned or uttered such a sentence, which comprehends all the ages in its sweeping injustice, and whose tone is so far removed from the polished moderation which a woman ought always to observe."

The scrupulous Atticism of Mme. de Souza shrunk, above all things, from the charge of rudeness in speech.

March, 1834.

Mme. de Souza died in Paris on the 16th of April, 1836, preserving to the last her courtesy of spirit and her indulgent smile.

IV.

MADAME ROLAND.¹

I.

THE French revolution has repeatedly changed its aspect towards the individuals who claim to be its offspring, and whom it certainly produced. As time elapses, differences in the manner of regarding it increase among the progeny, which was at first unanimous in its mode of recognition. The more ardent, those who claim to be the more advanced, have a growing tendency to systematize the revolution in their own minds; their aim is to coördinate men and things under high-sounding but hollow political and social formulas, which seem to us to torture the varied events with which they have to deal, and to impose upon them, by main force, a fallacious interpretation quite independent of the miserable passions by which, for the most part, they were controlled. Under cover of the general principles to which they are devoted, these men are endeavoring to manufacture an imposing mask for individual monstrosities and figures of unparalleled ugliness. Others, not adopting their formulas, who, when the way to democracy was opened,

¹ This fragment served as an introduction to the publication by Eugène Renduel, in 1835, of the inedited letters of Mme. Roland.

in '89, conceived more moderate and apparently more practicable hopes, but who see that after the lapse of forty years, as at the very outset, every step is attended by difficulties, checks, and disappointments, are at last tempted to regard the programme of that day as little else than a grand and generous illusion of our forefathers, a promised but deeply involved inheritance, which has been constantly deteriorating in value, until it is now three fourths wasted. There is a medium between this disheartening resignation and the exaggerated ideas of the other party. No doubt the majority of the authors and heroes of the revolution, could they return for a season to the midst of us, and see for what their blood was shed, would smile somewhat compassionately, unless, indeed, the lapse of years had cooled the ardor of their old requirements, and tranquillized the flow of their blood. Yet an unquestionable gain has been made in comfort, if not in glory: we have equality in our manners, if not grandeur in our deeds; civil enjoyments, if not political character; a certain facility in the employment of different orders of industry and talent, if not the consecration of such talent to the common interest of our country. For ourselves, who adopt and enjoy these results, realizing all the while their poverty in comparison with that of which we dreamed, who believe in social perfection however slow and increasingly difficult of attainment, thanks to the fallibility of all men, we continue at intervals to turn our eyes towards those horizons whose wide-spread blazonry illumined our own morning, towards those names which we have so often invoked in the hope of being able to reproduce the example and the virtues of those who bore them. Times have changed indeed, and so have duties, and it would

be vain to attempt to make direct applications; still, from the fiery furnace of our first revolution, side by side with vile and shapeless abortions, there came forth noble statues, which are shining in their places still. Let us maintain intercourse with these beings; let us beg them to impart to us their lofty thoughts; let us admire their heroism and disinterestedness, as we admire those grand characters of Plutarch whom we love to study in themselves, apart from the causes they espoused, or the fate of the cities they rendered famous.

More than ever, where so regarded, does the immortal Gironde become a limit where our thoughts are fain to linger, which they refuse to overpass. Of course what followed must be understood and explained, for thereby our country, though stained and mutilated, was in some sort protected too. All this should be understood; but, with a few rare exceptions, our admiration and regard are elsewhere. When we see the deadly and increasing repugnance excited in their posterity by those men of gigantic stature, whom the glare of the thunderbolt too often shows besmeared with mud and livid with gore, — when we consider the bold logic of their characteristic doctrines, and how soon these were made the occasion or pretext for terror and counter-oppressions, — we cannot wonder that their crimes, their violent, iniquitous, inhuman measures should have left, if only upon the diseased imaginations of their descendants, permanent, fatal, contagious marks, which reveal themselves now in exaggerated imitations of their theory, now in narrow and pusillanimous fears. But while with some the tumult of memory redoubles, with me it subsides and clears; and I turn more and more towards those noble and merciful figures, who, simultaneously,

by a sublime instinct and with a pitiful cry, stopped short beside the river of blood, and who, by their errors, their sincere illusions, by that very softness of youth which their savage enemies attributed to corruption, but which was only the weakness of honest men, — finally, also, by the few eternal verities which they confessed, — interest every one who has a human heart, and naturally attract the thought which can rise clear of sophistry to the search for human happiness. Mme. Roland is the foremost and the finest figure in that group. She is its genius — strong, pure, graceful. She is its muse, glorious and austere, with all the sanctity of martyrdom. But the idealized form of expression which our subject naturally suggests ought studiously to be restrained, for in approaching this illustrious woman we have to deal with a simple, grave, historic personage.

She has been so painted by her own hand that one would hardly care to follow her. Add the few original traits furnished by Lemontey and other contemporaries who had seen her, and we have but to turn for the essential features of her personality to her delicious and indispensable Memoirs. Who would tell the story of Jean Jacques — his childhood, his early struggles, his tender years, who would sketch the peculiarities of his youthful physiognomy after the Confessions? So with Mme. Roland. We may not retouch the nice drawing of those delicate and spirited features, — stately and gracious, intelligent and sweet, — nor dream even of reproducing that pure and simple profile, so modest yet so proud. Neither may we venture to retrace those days of childhood, whose freshness of delight she fixed in colors so vivid behind the gratings of the Abbaye or

of Sainte-Pélagie, from her father's studio in the Quay des Lunettes, and that favorite corner of the little drawing-room which was her chosen retreat; from her catechisings in the church of Saint-Barthelemy, her retirement to the convent in the Rue Neuve Sainte-Etienne for her first communion, and her rambles in the Jardin des Plantes, to her happy and grateful sojourn with her grandmamma Phlipon, in the Isle of Saint-Louis; her return to the paternal quay near the Point Neuf, and her Sunday excursions to the woods of Meudon. All this has been done and may be read. These details — so truthful, so natural, so happy in their aptitude and freedom of expression; these innocent and tender memories, rejoicing in their own brightness amid the dark and bloody framework ever narrowing about them, and destined soon prematurely to suppress and crush them altogether — go to make up a book whose charm is healthful and immortal, whose perusal tempers the soul, — none more so, — which is strengthening and admonitory, though so moving to the heart.

The correspondence with Bancal, and a few other unpublished letters which we have had the opportunity to examine, show us Mine. Roland during a portion of her life, passed lightly over in her Memoirs, after her purely private and domestic years, and before her husband's appointment to the ministry. Among the letters to Bose published in the last edition of the Memoirs, only a very few are referable to this epoch, — that is, to the interval between '89 and '92, — the last of her residence at Lyons and her earliest months in Paris; while the correspondence with Bancal comprises precisely this interesting period. The impressions produced by the memorable events then daily taking place, faithfully

and minutely transmitted by that grand, responsive soul, and confided to the ear of friendship, constitute a harvest precious to gather. The frequent and conflicting shocks, the premature hopes succeeded by despondency, the fervid revivals, the exaggerated and passionate judgments pronounced in wrath and afterwards softened, the frequent mingling of sound sense, the unflinching sincerity, — all these things help to make these artless pages an honorable testimonial to her who penned them, and at the same time, as we think, a useful lesson to those who seek in the records of the past some wisdom to aid, some rule to guide them, in forming their political opinions, some curb to their first generous transports. Nowhere else are we so fully made to realize that the importance of a definite end and deliberate progress was utterly overlooked by these men of the Gironde, who flung themselves desperately between M. Necker and Robespierre, and turned and faced the latter too late to escape defeat and destruction at his hands.

Mme. Roland and her husband had welcomed the revolution of '89 with enthusiasm. Since 1784 they had been established in the district of Lyons, passing some of the winter months in that town, and the greater part of the year now at Villefranche, and now two leagues distant at the close of La Plâtière, a little rural demesne in sight of the woods of Alix and hard by the village of Thézée. M. Roland, being inspector of manufactures, was devoted to industrial and economic studies, which his wife shared and enlivened by readings in philosophy and poetry. The revolution, and the expansive impulse which it communicated to all patriotic hearts, naturally put them in correspondence

with sundry active individuals in Paris. They became especially intimate with Brissot, — whose writings on the blacks and correspondence with the Marquis de Chastellux M. Roland greatly admired, and who was just starting the Patriot, — and with Bancal, who had recently abandoned the profession of notary to devote himself to letters and politics, and whom Lanthenas, an intimate friend and servant of the Rolands, had met during a visit to the capital. The letters to Brissot, inedited for the most part, are in the hands of M. de Montrol, whom we cannot too strongly urge to make them public, and to whose kindness we owe their perusal. The opening of the correspondence with Brissot is very like that of the correspondence with Bancal. "If my excellent friend," wrote Mme. Roland to the former, in the early part of the year '90, "had been a few years younger, America would ere this have received us in her arms; but we regret that promised land the less in that we now hope for a country of our own. The revolution, imperfect though it be, has changed the face of France. It is developing character where before there was none. It is opening a free course to Truth, whereby her worshippers may profit." We can see that the swift conquests of '89 were far from satisfying her, and her aversion and contempt for the leading men of that first epoch are not slow to appear. One week after the royal sitting of February 4, 1790, the swearing of the civic oath, and the address of Louis XVI., which aroused such general enthusiasm, she wrote to Brissot, "Opinion is much divided here. The address is ascribed to M. Necker; but although there are some ministerial turns of expression at the beginning, and a little of that pathos which is

rather common with him, the prevailing tone does not seem to us like his, and there are occasional touches of sentiment such as he, with his subterfuges and affectations, would never have known how to utter." This radical prejudice against M. Necker — which originated before '88, as we see by a word in a letter to M. Bosc, and which we find expressed in a rather unseemly fashion in the correspondence with Bancal (page 12) — is nought else, in its primitive, crude form, but the instinctive and well nigh invincible hostility of the Girondists to the doctrinary¹ mind — an hostility, moreover, bitterly reciprocated by the latter. In Mme. Roland and M. Necker we behold the earliest manifestation of this antagonism; but the parties, or at least the political families to which they severally belonged, have been so far perpetuated that their characteristics may now be generalized without reference to individuals. The Girondist type, reproduced in the youth of each successive generation, is ardent, adventurous, prone to popular sympathies, overweeningly confident in rapid reforms, simple methods, and the might of individual liberty; ever distrustful of its foes, but never of its allies; promptly and openly resentful of all that savors of secrecy or subterfuge; unhesitating in its denial of *sentiment* and *heart* to all who effectually bar its progress. The latter, in their turn, comfortably restrictive and negative in their prudence, never hesitating, if, amid the complexities of their system such need arise,

¹ The term *doctrinaire* was introduced under the Restoration, and applied to those men whose private political opinions were subordinated to a body of doctrine half liberal and half conservative. — TR.

to limit and encroach on the right from motives of policy, become extremely obnoxious to minds of the Girondist stamp, whom alternately they affect to despise as poor politicians, and in their eagerness to prove them dangerous, confound with the Jacobin party in one common condemnation. Mme. Roland, when she imputed Machiavelianism to M. Necker, to the committees of the Constituent Assembly, and to the national notabilities of 1790, was also guilty of excess. Far removed from the principal focus and from the details of those events actual observation of which, after the 5th of October, might have helped to exhaust her surplus zeal and discourage her faith, she was keenly alive to the vacillation and sluggishness of the Assembly, and its attempts at procrastination. She interpreted the struggles of Paris too literally by those of Lyons, where the old and new regime came into direct collision. Early disgusted with Lyons, and despairing of any result from the blind and passionate struggle of conflicting interests there going on, she did but aggravate the irritation of the general quarrel, the progress of which she had not closely followed, but whose complicated nature, even had she been at hand during its first phase of enthusiasm, she might all the same have failed to appreciate. Entirely misconceiving the increasingly difficult duty which devolved upon the sincere men of '89, she beheld, thenceforth, in the patriotic opposition and the members of the Assembly only the friends and enemies of the people in hostile array, and was convinced that nothing could come of it but a fierce struggle. Thus the starting-point of her political career was in reality a grave mistake, an erroneous view of the situation. She was in this mood of mind when she

arrived in Paris in February of '91. She had chosen her side, and was already deeply pledged, and all her Lyonnese resentments she brought, like fresh troops, to the aid of Brissot and the rest.

The letters of Mme. Roland to Bancal and Brissot furnish numbers of interesting facts relative to the history of Lyons at that time. As we compare them with recent events (and how can we fail to do so when we see the same interests at stake, the same dissensions revived, the same devices upon the banners), we see how the old sore remains and has spread, and how little, in the space of forty years, our vaunted social science has effected in the way of cure. We are humbled to perceive how modera'te have been our gains, despite the perpetual invocation of that god, Progress, whom men are everywhere inaugurating.

Mme. Roland strikes us, at the beginning, as one of the most eloquent and incorruptible, and altogether one of the fittest models to study of that race of politicians who had longed for '89, and whom '89 did not fatigue — nor even satisfy. From the first she is consciously and confessedly in the vanguard. "Destiny, in causing our own birth to coincide with that of freedom, has made us like that forlorn hope which must needs fight and conquer for the army. It is for us to perform our tasks well, and so prepare the happiness of future generations." While she continues to take this broad philosophic view of the situation, her magnanimous attitude is in harmony with truth, and time has only consecrated her words. The spirit of disinterestedness requisite in public affairs finds noble and vigorous expression beneath her pen. "When one is not used," she says, "to identify his own interest and honor with the general

good and glory, he makes but insignificant progress, being absorbed in self, and utterly losing sight of his true end and aim." Yet even then her noble heart, so free from vulgar ambitions, fully accepted the idea of storms to come, and even invoked them — possibly as occasions for the display of her own fortitude. Bancal, when describing to her his ascent of the Puy-de-Dôme, had compared the thunders and tempests encountered at a certain elevation to those which beset the painful upward path of the friends of freedom. "That glorious mountain summit of yours," replies Mme. Roland, "is the image of the one which all great souls are struggling to gain amid political agitations and the tumult of passion." She had a presentiment that her own true level was a lofty one, and in her inmost heart she did not repudiate the idea of being one day forced to attain it. But when she confines herself to more practical opinions and a consideration of the details of government, the vagueness and insufficiency of her system become apparent. "She professes," she somewhere acknowledges, "two capital principles — that security is the grave of liberty, and that leniency towards men in authority is the true method of forcing them into tyranny." Elsewhere she demands that the Assembly should provide first of all for the unlimited freedom of the press, which came fully to pass in 1790. In a letter addressed to Brissot, in December of the same year, she sums up her advice as follows: "Reports and reason — nothing else can render the people happy." Yet this weakness and lack of positive political science are constantly relieved by political views remarkable for their justice and sagacity, and which show that she was under no delusion with regard to the real state of

society. Speaking of a pamphlet by Lally Tolendal, she says of the men of his stamp, "They flatter the passions of the malecontents, they seduce the inconsiderate, they confuse weak minds. Take away from society these individuals and the ignorant class, whom, after a fashion, they control, and see how many men of sound and enlightened minds will remain to stem the torrent and preach the truth." But the ardor of the attack and something like the joy of battle, bear her swiftly on to a point where her anticipations become less flattering. Peril gives animation to her style, and causes her pen to sparkle. To Bosc she writes, "People no longer dare to speak, say you? Well, then, let them thunder." A letter to Lanthenas of the 6th of March, '90, begins with the thrice-repeated cry, "War! war! war!" The burden of her song is always a reveille "Joy and Safety!" more often "Vigilance and Fraternity!" — the sentinel's cry upon the ramparts, as one may say, when he calls to the conflict at dawn. Even the expression "*Morbleu*" occurs, and does not seem out of place. A letter to Brissot on the 7th of January, '91, closes with these hurried words: "Yours, in haste. The wife of Cato must not amuse herself with paying compliments to Brutus."

Between the month of February, in which Mme. Roland came to Paris, and September, when she returned to Lyons, — during that half year, so pregnant, so effervescent, which comprehended the flight of the king and the scenes at the Champ de Mars, — we behold her aggressive spirit becoming more and more conspicuous, and excited to the last degree by the whirlwind atmosphere in which she lived. The correspondence with Bancal is especially precious, in that

it supplies us with the history of her tumultuous impressions during this sojourn. In the pages which she devotes to them in her Memoirs, her emotions, though still lively, are softened by distance and blended with judgments of a later date. Here we have a daily record of her thoughts and deeds. We see her despising the pleasures of the theatre and all mere gratifications of taste, but hurrying to the Assembly, to find it first weak, then corrupt; to regard it first with severity, afterwards with indignation and wrath. She sees plainly that '89 and the *impartials* have become the most dangerous enemies of the revolution. Sieyès, Barnave, Thouret, and Rabaut, the most of those with whom she is soon to die, by no means escape being characterized as lax and perfidious; Pétion, Buzot, and Robespierre alone satisfy her. But there is nothing of hers more telling and characteristic than an article which she penned during a sitting of the Assembly on the 20th or 28th of April. On the occasion of organizing the national guards, the distinction of active and passive citizens had been revived. Hence her rage and tears of blood. The article, which begins with these words — "Throw thy pen into the fire, generous Brutus, and betake thyself to the cultivation of lettuce" — closes with this military metaphor: "Adieu! we must beat to battle or retreat: there is no middle course." And yet, with all her reckless and passionate transports, she preserves a clearness of reason far worthier than these of her great intelligence. Her estimate of Mirabeau is beautifully lucid and calm, and as regards events, she often appears to possess a foresight truly marvellous, being in no respect deceived about their tendency, while yet she will not waver or relent. Thus

to Bancal she writes, "We are not yet called to die for liberty. There is more to be done. We must live to establish, to deserve, to defend it;" and elsewhere, "I know that good citizens, such as I see every day, regard the future with tranquil eyes; but, for all I hear them say, I am more than ever convinced that they are deluded;" and again, "I think the wisest are those who confess that it has become next to impossible to forecast future events." In one place (page 233) she dwells with the utmost good sense upon patience,—a virtue too often neglected, and yet very necessary to the well-meaning if they would accomplish useful results; and then, with singular inconsistency, she herself fails in patience immediately afterwards. Regretting that the fugitive Louis XVI. had been arrested at Varennes, she assigns as a reason that but for this unlucky capture, *civil war would have been inevitable, and the nation would have been forced into that grand school of public virtues*. Exasperated by the events of the Champ de Mars, she "has come," she says, "to applaud the utmost excesses of the Assembly,—nay, even to long for greater ones,—as the only means of arousing the public conscience." Far dearer to me is this virgin soul, long self-restrained and suddenly over-mastered, when, yielding to the contemplation of infinite perspectives of hope for those descendants whom she will never see, she confesses, with tears and rapture, her unbounded faith in that religion of the future which commands the respect of those even who do not clearly distinguish the foundations on which it rests. Having been tearful witness to a triumph of Brissot's over the Jacobins, she exclaims, "At last I have seen the fire of freedom

kindled in my land. It cannot be put out. Recent events have been as fuel to the flames. The lights of reason and the instincts of the heart unite to fan and feed it. I shall die when it may please nature, but my last breath will be an aspiration of joy and hope for coming generations."

The strictures of Mme. Roland on La Fayette are especially striking in the contrast which they offer to the unanimous reverence which he inspires in his patriotic old age. In her correspondence with Bancal, she repeatedly shows herself extremely unjust. In an unpublished letter to Brissot, dated July 31, '92, and very important from an historical point of view, she becomes, it must be confessed, absolutely injurious and insulting; and so far forgets herself as to qualify the virtuous general by the very epithet which the angry Voltaire did not hesitate to bestow upon Rousseau. It is humiliating to think of the well nigh irretrievable wrongs which political passions entail, and for which noble souls have afterwards to weep. A fortnight before her death, Mme. Roland repented — so to speak — of her old acrimony against La Fayette. In defending Brissot, who had been accused by Amar of complicity with the general, she uses the following words: "He shared a very common error with regard to La Fayette; or, rather, it would seem that La Fayette, carried away in the first place by the principles which his intellect adopted, had not the force of character needful to defend them when the struggle became a hard one; or, possibly, terrified by the consequences of the overweening popular ascendancy, he judged it prudent to establish some sort of check." These various suppositions are evidently the successive steps by which Mme.

Roland came down, as we may say, from her original height of injustice; but we see, by the precautions she takes, that when injustice has once been done (and, in general, how hastily done!), a lingering remnant of false shame renders it most painful to repair.

Returning to Paris towards the close of the year '91, Mme. Roland may fairly be said in March '92 to have entered the ministry with her husband. After the expiration of that first term of office, Roland and his wife occupied sometimes a country seat at Champigny-sur-Marne, and sometimes a lodging at No. 81 Rue de la Harpe. During the months which preceded the 10th of August, the political activity of our heroine was unremitting; but her experience had borne fruit. She ceased to urge on the movement, such as it was, and even strove to retard it. After mingling freely with the influential men and party leaders, she had soon fathomed their characters with all a woman's subtilty, and classified them with a masculine vigor of intellect. Petty differences between her husband and Brissot or Clavières had shown her the difficulty of combined and uniform progress on the part even of the best of men. As the imminent crisis of the 10th of August drew near, she no longer called, as after Varennes, for stern and decisive measures: she desired the sections to unite, and demand, not forfeiture,¹ which, "if pronounced, would render the constitutional enactment well nigh void," but provisory suspension, "which," she wrote to Brissot on the last of July, "might possibly, although with difficulty, be made to grapple some article of the Constitution." A letter from Louvet to Brissot, a week

¹ Of the royal office on the part of Louis XVI.

only before the 10th of August, is in the same strain, and expresses the same fear of weakness on the one side and excess on the other. Mme. Roland, like Louvet, complained of the silence of the Assembly, and of the dubious attitude of their friend, in these so threatening circumstances. The judgment pronounced by Mme. Roland on the politicians of the second revolutionary period, on those whom she had personally known and proved, is as distinct and decisive as her contempt of the men of '89 may have seemed vague and blind. The reason is, that, after '90, she had a near view of the scene, and possessed all the facts of the situation, and the elements of the conduct there displayed. Her *Memoirs* contain brilliant and truthful portraits of her friends, a little in the style of Plutarch; but it is far more curious to study their likenesses as here taken,—in action and under the fire of battle, confidentially and not officially, in private and not for posterity. The letter to Brissot of July 31, '92, which has been already cited, was designed to caution him on the score of his too easy temper and lenient judgments, and furnishes very minute information about that illustrious and fraternal group who seem, at this distance, to stand irradiated by a common halo. They defile before us, each with his proper physiognomy, and every individual is briefly characterized. First we have the worthy Sers, afterwards senator, the amiable philosopher, used to moderate pleasures, but slow and timid, and therefore incompetent in a revolution: then Gensonné, so weak with regard to Dumouriez in the affair of Bonne Carrère; who does not know how to sacrifice a man at the right moment; with too many images in his brain, and not enough resolution in his character: then

the estimable Guadet, who, on the other hand, is too hasty, too ready with his wrath or contempt; and who was, moreover, deceived about the capacity of Duranton, whom he urged into action, and has forever compromised his judgment by this inexcusable blunder: finally, Vergniaud, whom she does not greatly love; whom we feel to have been too epicurean, too languid and voluptuous, for this woman with the soul of Cornelia; she will not, she says, allow herself to pass judgment upon him; but evidently it is not as easy for her as for us to regard the unexpected temporizings of the impulsive and high-flown orator as merely the reckless caprices of genius. She thinks him far too vain in his toilet, and distrusts, we know not wherefore, those downcast eyes, which yet would so lighten under the magic power of speech! In her final portrait of Vergniaud, although she makes amends for the injustice of her first fleeting impression, we see plainly how slight was the sympathy between them. Friend Clavières seems to her in the retrospect more trustworthy, and, when not crochety, absolutely lovable. "What would you have?" said Mme. de Staël, when some one reproached her with showing up her friends too freely; "if I were on my way to the scaffold, I could not help judging the friends who accompanied me." So it was with Mme. Roland. Among all these excellent and worthy men she sought in vain for a great character, able, in this crisis, to reassure and rally by his counsels the party of right. O, in those days how she must have mourned for the honest and disinterested Mirabeau! Even while she adjures Brissot to assume the command, we can see that she trusts him little, knowing him to be *excessively hopeful*, and

of a pliant and even guileless nature. Could she herself, had she been a man, have become the good genius of patriotism, the savior of the land? We love to think so; and there is nothing in her conduct at this time which belies the presence in her of a clairvoyant daring, a vast and most apposite ability.

But, confining ourselves to her estimate of others,—since, by reason of her sex, she was hampered and inadequate in action,—we are struck by the soundness of her judgment, and the keenness of her insight, even when clouded by passion. Her invectives against Garat, for instance, are extremely severe, and allow no glimpse of the subordinate qualities of that man of talent and even sensibility, who was amiable and fluent, and as good and sincere as one may be who is only a brilliant sophist, and untempered by virtue. And yet, after a reperusal of Garat's own apology in his *Memoirs*, I find that, despite all the author's denials, and his elegant, ingenuous, analytical explications, Mme. Roland's unfavorable judgment remains unrefuted and substantially sound. As we read the subtle specifications, the Ciceronian periods, of him who dared stigmatize neither Clodius nor Catiline, we can readily imagine Mme. Roland's indignation against this soft language of palliation, in presence of what she calls crime; against the conciliatory pretensions of that supple intelligence so entirely subservient to a vibratory imagination. Mme. Roland foresaw that this explanation would be made; and she demolished it in advance when she wrote to Garat from her prison, "Betake yourself to fine writing; account on philosophical principles for events, and their attendant errors and passions: posterity will still say of you,

“He strengthened the hands of the party that brought popular representation into contempt.” As for Brissot, we adopt in full Mme. Roland’s estimate of him; her testimony to his thorough honesty and disinterestedness. We make this statement because it has been sad and sickening for us to see the learned, conscientious, but system-ridden authors of a history of the revolution, otherwise worthy of credit, reproducing as unanswerable certain odious imputations upon the probity of the Girondist leader. It is not easy, at the end of fifty years, to defend Brissot against the calumnies of Morande; but his whole public career is a denial and refutation of the charges adduced against his previous obscure life. I was born in the region where Brissot first resided, at Boulogne, where he worked with Swinton, and where he married; I am related to persons who extended to him a welcome at that time; to that Cavilliers family where he was so intimate during his calumniated years: and I have never heard expressed the slightest doubt of his unswerving integrity and virtuous poverty. If we were to have a full biography of Brissot, in the style of a recent essay, would it serve, I wonder, as prelude to a theory of the sacrifice of a corrupt and *Protestant* Gironde to a Catholic and incorruptible Robespierre? So be it! All I can say is, that the latter would smile his ugliest smile, could he read the biography of his victim, thus prematurely arrayed in blemished fillets.

In the correspondence with Bancal, frequent mention is made of Blot and Lanthenas, both of whom were soon alienated by differences of opinion from their illustrious friends. Lanthenas, to whom Mme. Roland alludes in her Memoirs as a slightly exacting

swain, and whom she characterizes in her letters as a saint (*bon apôtre*), was so in fact, in the full and least flattering sense of the term. A well-meaning, impressive, excitable man, one of those on whom the revolution seized at the very outset, and whom it tossed aloft like *cerfs volants*,¹ extremely useful in the household up to that time,—the very ideal of a *famulus*,—he afterwards undertook to think and act for himself, and lost his head in the *mêlée*. Perhaps I ought rather to say that he lost his mind; for Marat, his former fellow-student in medicine, who had taken his measure without malice, inflicted a crowning injury by causing his name to be erased from the fatal list, as of “weak mind.”² We foresee this grievous destiny of Lanthenas from the moment when we find him addressing Brissot in articles with such silly titles as, “When the people is ripe for liberty, the nation is always worthy to be free;” and especially when he proposes to Bancal to “form a mighty league which shall work simultaneously in France and England, and rid us entirely of the priests in the course of a few years.” And still, by the qualities of his heart, and his old love for Mme. Roland, the good Lanthenas deserved a better fate.

The correspondence with Bancal stops at the second ministry of Roland; interrupted, as it were, by a double cry of heroic alarm at the approach of the Prussians, and of horror and execration at the September massacres. After these days, Mme. Roland and her friends

¹ Kites, a child's toy made of paper, somewhat in the form of a shuttlecock, attached by a string to the hand of the player, and floating when tossed into the air. — TR.

² He said before the whole Convention, that, “as for Dr. Lanthenas, everybody knew that his mind was weak.”

organized openly and boldly for resistance. What change of theory was then wrought in the mind of the Girondists? They had no time for reflection, no opportunity to reconsider and rearrange their ideas of government and the constitution. Divided among themselves even about the most imperative measures, trembling and paralyzed before those other inflexible theories which were being thrust in their faces like keen and steady swords, their resistance was wholly a matter of instinct, humanity, and heart. Into what would their political views have ripened, if they themselves had not perished? To judge by their survivors,—Louvet, Lanjuinais, and those of the seventy-one who respected their memory,—they would have remained faithful to a thorough, generous, republican form of freedom; to the freedom of the year 3, even though it had still proved unequal to the conflict with intrigue and passion. They would have fallen back upon the principles of '89 for a basis; their antipathy against the men of that epoch would have died away; or, at least, a feeling of respect would forever have silenced the war of abusive words. The noble André Chénier would not have vilified the pure intentions of Brissot. Mme. Roland could not have failed to give her hand to La Fayette. All the leading minds, from M. Necker to Louvet, however hasty and headstrong they may have seemed, were still upon the same side of the stream, and acknowledged the same social laws. They found space among themselves for disputes about the extent of authority, and differences concerning the limits of freedom; but a radical incompatibility of principles, as well as of manners and temperament,—the abyss which, on the 2d of September, opened under

the very feet of the Gironde, — separated them from the bloodthirsty extremists and their savage system. From the moment when fanaticism no longer recoils from slaughter as a method, social life is at an end. The bounds of human morality are overpassed; the restrictions which civilization imposes upon nature are violated. The fundamental guaranty of man's right to live and communicate with and differ from his kind is swept away.

I must crave pardon for insisting so strongly upon the fact of this abyss, this Rubicon, — narrow indeed, but fathomless, — which divided the foremost of the Girondists from their Jacobin foes. The demarcation is historically essential. If there be (which God forbid!) any similarity between the situation of to-day and that which we describe, any chance for reorganizing parties analogous to those, it becomes especially needful to make the statement, and to guard against all confusion. However candid the original Girondists may have been, in so long failing to perceive the radical point of difference between themselves and their future enemies, the Girondists of our day, enlightened by experience, would be very unfair if they pretended not to see it.

We gather from the correspondence with Bancal minute information concerning the sentiments of Mme. Roland, and such as strengthens our sense of the depth and simplicity of her character. Mindful of individual attachments, she awards them a large and fair space; and, so far from sacrificing them, in an ultra Spartan fashion, on the altar of her country, she cultivates them with pious care. She loves to associate with the names of friends those public sympathies which

engross and carry her away; "for thus," she says in her musical style, whose finished turns of expression recall the conversation of Mme. de Wolmar, "we add to the mighty interest inspired by a glorious history the affecting interest peculiar to a private sentiment, and with the patriotism which elevates, and, as it were, generalizes, the affections, there mingles the charm of friendship, which adorns and perfects them."

The letters of the 24th and 26th of January, '91, addressed to Bancal, who was then in London, and in which she tries to console him for his father's death, deserve a place beside the most sublime and eloquent effusions of a brave yet tender philosophy. Cicero and Seneca offered more commonplace comfort, and suggested considerations more remote and less moving to the heart. Marcus Aurelius would have been more stoical, and could not thus have entered into sorrow; but if the son-in-law of Agricola had had to speak to a friend of the death of a father, I can fancy that he would have approached him with words such as these, — manly and yet compassionate, temperate as befits a solemn reality.

The superficial reader of this correspondence may possibly miss some of its most interesting features. The truth is, that during these years there was a kind of romance in progress, accompanied by more or less of complication, between Mme. Roland and Bancal — yes, a veritable heart history, whose half-hidden traces we now and then discern beneath the proprieties of language and the absorbing interest of great events. Bancal, from the very commencement of their intercourse, seems to have been deeply fascinated. We gather from Mme. Roland's gentle raillery that he

maintained that their mutual attraction was not due solely to the revolution, that it would have occurred all the same had there been no special call for patriotism, and that they were predestined to a reciprocal attachment. There are secret ties. There are sympathies. During a sojourn at the close of La Platière, some time in September, 1790, Bancal became doubly captivated, and the two having fallen on a certain day into confidential converse, he found it impossible to hide from his friend the disquiet that she caused him. Leaving soon after, he wrote a letter to M. and Mme. Roland, jointly; but the latter, to whom it was forwarded by her absent husband (he was then at Lyons or Villefranche), seized upon certain expressions which she interpreted in a very special manner, and ventured, in the absence and without the knowledge of M. Roland, to write from the country, on the 8th of October, a letter, which, with no further comment, we leave to the sensibility of the reader. But the emotion which this letter betrays was the index of sentiment merely, not of a passion. In another — a kind of aside — dated October 28, Mme. Roland reverts to the subject, and endeavors to calm the imagination of her friend and restore him to reason. Elsewhere she quotes the fable of the nightingale and the linnet, complaining, pleasantly enough and with a kind of veiled coquetry, of the inevitable forgetfulness of the traveller, who really seems to have neglected his friends. We find, too, in her letters of condolence, certain promises of fidelity to tender memories they have in common; then, after his return to London, the expression of a fond anxiety at witnessing his protracted sadness. But all is ended by the avowal of a new passion on the part of Bancal, on

which occasion Mme. Roland, like a discreet and generous friend, lavishes upon him her counsels and delicate offers of intervention. This could not have been the genuine, serious, long-delayed sentiment which at length seized the strong soul of Mme. Roland, and to which she twice alludes in her Memoirs. First, when she speaks of the excellent reasons which hastened her departure for the country somewhere about the 31st of May; and again when hailing the empire of philosophy, which had succeeded to that of religious feeling within her, she adds that these continuous defences ought, it would seem, forever to protect her from the onslaught of passion, from which, nevertheless, *though she strive with the energy of an athlete, she can scarcely defend her mature years!* Who, then, was the object of that late, unique, heart-rending passion? A prejudiced public has named Barbaroux, because, in a noble sketch of him, she praises that "head of Antinoüs;" but there is no proof that it was he. A sacred veil will continue to hide this latest storm, which gathered and passed in silence over her mighty spirit when death was near.

In a letter found among Brissot's papers, but not addressed to him, — for at that date (November 22, '89), there was no such connection between them as is here indicated, — Mme. Roland has once mentioned Mme. de Staël. "Stories are told here" (at Lyons), says Mme. Roland, "of Mme. de Staël, who is said to be very constant at the Assembly, and who, they pretend, has cavaliers there to whom she sends billets from the gallery, urging them to support the patriotic measures. They say, too, that the Spanish ambassador has reproved her severely at her father's table. You cannot conceive the importance attached by our aristocrats to

this nonsense, which perhaps originated in their own brains. They would willingly represent the Assembly as governed by a few blind fanatics urged on by a handful of women." Mme. de Staël, on the other hand, has nowhere, that I remember, mentioned Mme. Roland. Was this the instinct of filial vengeance on behalf of her misconceived and vilified father? or was it the weakness of a woman who averts her eye from a rival? In that chapter of the *Considerations* which treats of the Girondist group, Mme. Roland is conspicuous by her absence. Yet it is impossible to help comparing and contrasting, in imagination, these two illustrious women. Mme. Roland, who was eleven years the elder, owed to her bourgeois education the advantage of original and entire freedom from the vanity, the artificiality, and the tinsel of society. Her little recess in the drawing-room near her father's studio was worth more, as a juvenile asylum, than the arm-chair in M. Necker's salon, surrounded by a circle of wits, or even than the romantic shades of Saint-Ouen. Mlle. Philippon, therefore, became the more masculine and simple character of the two. She early formed the habit of repressing sensibility and imagination, of pausing at the dictates of reason, and regulating her conduct thereby. We do not find her, at fifteen, completely enamoured of any but M. de Guibert; and M. de Boismorel, who seems to play a part in her life analogous to his, is a perfectly quiet and commonplace figure in her eyes. The philosophic and rationalistic tinge which she assumes, and to some extent affects, makes her even a little antipathetic and unjust towards the reigning wits and literati of the day, so dear to the heart of Mlle. Necker. Her feeling is the very opposite of infatuation. She loses

none of their absurdities. She finds the bearing of d'Alembert insignificant, the pronunciation of Abbé Delille unpleasant; Ducis and Thomas seem to her to extol one another like the two asses in the fable, and she is quite ready to see an ordinary man of letters in him of whom Mme. de Staël has said, with such consummate tact, "Garat was then minister of justice, and in happier times he had been one of the best writers in France." Yet let no one think to represent Mme. Roland as a mere stoical philosopher, a strict citizen like her husband, — in a word, as anything but a woman. A woman she is. We recognize her as such amid all her philosophy and her wisdom, by her need of acting, if not openly, of touching the springs, although she never boasted of so doing. With what smiling satisfaction she describes herself as seated at her little table in the cabinet which Marat called her boudoir, and writing, under cover of the minister, her famous letter to the pope. More than once, during M. Roland's second ministry, was she summoned before the bar of the Convention; and she came and answered, all questions, modestly but fully, in language singularly apt and clear. Beneath this modest air men read her radiant enjoyment of this active participation in political affairs. On her return to Villefranche, after her six months at Paris, in '91, when about to reënter private life, — never having dreamed of the ministry for her husband, — how she suffers under the stifling obscurity and nullity of the province! How her heart dies within her! She, too, felt that she was formed for an active, influential, manifold part, — for that main stage of action where, at every step, the intellect finds food and the love of glory is stimulated. She, too, far from Paris, exiled from the

large and lofty existence whose joys she had tasted, would have begged, but gently, for her Rue de la Harpe. And if any prophetic vision could then have revealed her public career, so brief, so crowded; her messages to the pope and the king from the depths of her austere boudoir; her ever-applauded appearance before the bar of the Assembly; and, for the last scene of the drama, herself, white-robed and with floating hair, mounting the scaffold in triumph, — if she could have had her choice, surely she would never have wavered. Like Achilles of old, she would have preferred the fate of the warrior, early stricken and immortal, to any obscure fireside happiness. And yet she appreciated domestic life, the mother's vocation, managed the affairs of her household in all simplicity, and could hearken to Nature in her secret solitudes. Out-door details — the coloring of vines and nut-trees, the toil of the vine-dresser, the harvest, the poultry-yard, the store of gathered fruit, the *dried pears* — she was passionately fond of all these things, and busied herself with them. In a letter to Bose — rich, beautiful, and, as it were, fertile in its rusticity — she exclaims, "I am assifying per force,"¹ which would not have sounded well beneath the majestic shades of Coppet.² George Sand, in her best days, might so have written from Berri. To complete the picture of Mme. Roland's domestic qualities, we need but recall the opening of that

¹ *Saturæ sordida rura casæ*, says Martial. "I am assifying perforce, and immersed in the petty cares of this *piggish* country life." (Letter of October 12, 1785.) She uses this word *assify* because she was then drinking asses' milk.

² Mme. de Stael used to say that she should like agriculture well enough if agriculture smelled less strongly of manure.

other letter which she wrote to Bose from Villefranche. "Seated by the fire at eleven A. M., after a peaceful night and the performance of my various morning duties, my friend at his desk, my little girl knitting, and I talking with the one, and superintending the work of the other, happy in the tender affection of my dear little family, and writing to a friend while the snow falls without," &c. Along with these antique fashions, this wholesome and kindly bourgeois life, we may venture to note its drawbacks. In default of aristocratic punctilio is not the plebeian and philosophic boastfulness rather annoying. When Mme. Roland alludes, with a superior smile, to the disciples of Jesus, her strong-minded accent shocks me. When, in imitation of Jean Jacques, she commits to paper certain details which it becomes every woman to reserve, she seems to enjoy, with a kind of fine stoical humor and contempt of sexual distinctions, allusions unworthy of one who was chastity itself. Her virtuous levity allows her, in another similar case, to find the romances of Louvet¹ merely *pretty* and tasteful. These whims of philosophism could not, however, spoil her air of perfect womanliness, nor that consummate grace which the friction of the revolution never tarnished. No heed should be paid, on this head, to the insinuations of Mme. de Créquy, who has given us a picture of Mme. Roland in her youth, which is in other respects charming.

The style and language of Mme. Roland are clearer, more vigorous, and more concise than Mme. de Staël's,

¹ *Les Aventures du Chevalier de Faublas* and *Emilie de Varl-mont* — scandalous tales, in which the author professed to lay bare the corruptions of his time, particularly in the higher ranks of society. — TR.

in her earlier manner—a difference traceable to the character and mental habits of the two writers, and to Mme. Roland's ten years of seniority. In her solitary leisure, she had already written much, and on all sorts of subjects. She came before the public ripe and ready. The pages which she threw off in haste attest a thorough and practised pen—a mind capable of comprehending and describing a multitude of relations. Mme. de Staël, arraigned before the same Assembly, would probably have spoken with less calmness and self-possession. She would have been inclined to display, and easily overcome. The one, like a Roman matron controlling her shyness and pride, would have hidden under the folds of her robe her stylus and tablets. Delphine might have trembled and felt her heart swell, but like a Norse woman, she would not have feared to loosen her girdle and bring forth her harp. And yet Mme. Roland is very much under the spell of the same sentimental inspiration as that other daughter of Jean Jacques. “Whatever be the fruits of observation and the rules of philosophy,” she cries to Bancal, “I believe in a surer guide for healthful souls, and that is feeling.” Like Mme. de Staël, again, she reads Thomson with tears; and if, later in her republican vein, she devotes herself to Tacitus, and desires no other reading, was not the republican author of the work on literature also fed on Sallust and the letters of Brutus? The narratives of both show the utmost vivacity of mind, and they regard with a kind of transport of contempt the base calumniators around them. They can employ, whenever occasion demands, that play of irony so natural to superior women. In the course of years I think they would have assimilated

still more. The former would have learned more of the world, and would have abated her stoicism in presence of the actual. The powers of the latter would have ripened, and her illusions would have passed away.¹ A tribute which can rarely be paid to great and glorious beings, but which Mme. Roland especially deserves, is this, — the deeper you search into her life and letters, the more simple the whole appears. Always the same language, the same frank thoughts, — not a secret, not a complication, — whether of passion or of contending inclinations and desires. Even that last mysterious love — whose object is unknown, whose existence is but twice confessed — is majestic in its silence. For the rest, all is true, obvious, perfectly limpid — not a stain, nor a veil to be raised. Peer as closely as you will into her house of glass, — transparent as ever the old Roman desired, — the light of reason and innocence irradiates its well-ordered and

¹ The name of Mme. Roland has sometimes been compared with that of Mistress Hutchinson, a woman of equal powers, and the author of memoirs which, though somewhat monotonous and not very amusing, are solid and healthful reading. Mistress Hutchinson descants too much, during a whole volume or more, on the entanglements of her husband, the governor of Nottingham, with the local committees, and is not sufficiently explicit about his conduct in Parliament during the affair of the king and afterwards; but the beginning and the end are perfect, and sensibly impregnated, or rather *kneaded*, with veracity. It is touching to see the love and respect of Mistress Hutchinson for her noble husband, and how modestly she attributes all her own virtues to him. "While he was here he was her life! Now she is but the faded image of her former self." But Mistress Hutchinson and Mme. Roland differ as widely as the two revolutions that produced them.

refined interior. How this woman bears scrutiny from the stand-point of the actual! Close upon death she could exclaim, without any affectation, in her parting hymn, "Farewell, my child, my husband, my maid, my friends, all! Farewell, sun, whose beams bring peace to my soul, while recalling it to the skies. Farewell, lonesome fields, the sight of which has so often moved me, and you, rustic inhabitants of Thézée, who were wont to bless me when I came, whose sweat I have wiped away, whose misery I have soothed, whose sickness I have tended. Farewell, farewell, peaceful alcoves, where my spirit was fed on truth, my imagination captivated by study, and where I learned in the silence of meditation to rule my senses and to despise vanity."

There has been an attempt of late to make Mme. Roland the type of the woman of the future, a brave republican wife, inspiring her husband, equal or superior to him; substituting, as it is said, for Christian meekness and virginal timidity a noble and clairvoyant daring. But this is an ambitious and delusive chime-ra. Women like Mme. Roland will always make themselves a place, but they will always be exceptional. A more wholesome and temperate system of education than now prevails, marriages more accordant with the real fitness of things will, doubtless,—at least we hope so,—tend to make the relation of man and wife one of the intellect as well as of the other faculties. Nevertheless, we cannot afford to transmute the old virtues, or even the old graces. There is the more need to preserve them. We would remind those who adduce Mme. Roland as an example, that she did not, ordinarily, neglect those graceful amenities which con-

stitute her empire in common with the rest of her sex, while the keen, irrepressible, and, at times, self-asserting genius which belonged to her alone, cannot, unless by some strange hallucination, be deemed authority for others.

August, 1835.

MADAME ROLAND.¹

II.

It may seem that enough, and more than enough, has been said on the subject of Mme. Roland. We ourselves discussed her some time since, and now occasion offers, and we renew the theme. In criticism as well as in life there is a certain fidelity to one's old attachments, which is a pleasure and a profit, as well as a duty. We expand too much nowadays in writing as well as in living. We are all critics, and we try our hand at everything. Within and without we are all like commonplace drawing-rooms; but it is well not quite to forget the old favorite nooks.

True, the world does not think so; and inveterate habits displease the public. When it has had enough of an author or a personage, however excellent, it wants no more. "We know all that," it says; "pass on to something else." And so I should not be surprised, if, despite the intrinsic interest of the correspondence just published, certain readers should find it monotonous and tiresome. Those, on the other hand, who believe that a soul is a microcosm, and that an eminent character can never be too minutely studied,—those in whose estimate of Mme. Roland

¹ This second article was called forth by the publication of some further inedited letters of Mme. Roland by Coquebert, in 1840.

there mingles the worship of a fond affection, — will find in it a thousand fresh reasons for their sympathy, and will discover a multitude of particulars as reliable as they are interesting.

When about eleven years of age, Mlle. Philipon was placed in the convent of the Dames de la Congregation, Rue Neuve Saint Etienne, to receive her first communion. There she became acquainted with two young girls from Amiens, sisters, a little older than herself, — Mles. Henriette and Sophie Cannet, — and grew very fond of them — of Sophie especially. When she left the convent, and went back to her father in the Quai de Lunettes, she opened an active and constant correspondence with Sophie, who herself had returned to Amiens. It is this correspondence, preserved as a great treasure in the family of the ladies Cannet, which M. Auguste Breuil, an advocate, has recently obtained for publication from the hands of their worthy heirs.

It comprises and fills, almost without interruption, the interval between January, 1772, and January, 1780. At its commencement, the young girl was not quite eighteen; when the last letter was written, she was almost twenty-six. There were others, doubtless, that had no regular connection with the rest, and have not been preserved. The final letter mentions the writer's approaching marriage with M. Roland, the earliest announcement of which was due to the Amiens friends. A four years' residence in that place interrupted the correspondence; at least it could no longer continue on the same footing as before. The letters end, like any romance, with a wedding; and a romance indeed they are — a romance of early years, and of the friend-

ship of two young girls, school friends, just entering upon life.

Sophie is the more cool, calm, and happy of the two. Manon Phlipon is what might be supposed — just what she so clearly describes herself in her *Memoirs*. But here the progressive development appears in every letter — rich, artless, continuous. We behold her soul, her talents, her reasoning powers, slowly taking shape, and struggling towards the light. The letters of Mme. Roland to her young friends furnish proof to my mind of the truth of this idea. If the perfect moral creature is ever to be formed within us, it is formed early. It exists at twenty in all its integrity and all its grace. Then, if at all, we bear within us our Plutarchian hero, our Alexander. Subsequently we come too often to survive our hero. In proportion as he develops and is displayed before the eyes of others, he actually loses. When the world begins to appreciate him, he is already deteriorating. Sometimes (horrible thought!) he has already ceased to be. Frankness, self-sacrifice, fidelity, courage — these keep their old names, but scarcely deserve them. Each soul in its progress incurs all the stains, undergoes all the waste, of which it is capable. “All men,” says the noble and charitable Vauvenargues, “are born truthful, and die deceitful.” It might have sufficed him for the expression of his bitter thought to say, “they die undeceived.” At all events, even with the best of us, the result of what is called progress in life is very inferior to the pristine ideal realized in some moment of our youth. We are fortunate, therefore, whenever we can discover original likenesses of those who are foreordained to fame; when some unforeseen chance reveals them to us exactly as they were at the

chosen and unique moment, at their blossoming, "their hour of beauty," as the Greeks used to say. In all the rest of our view of them there must be more or less of anachronism.

Mme. Roland certainly appeared greater at a later day; but was she ever wiser, more profound, more lovable, than in these youthful hours of intimate outpouring? When the public declared in her favor, by how many scenes was her triumph purchased! The fourth act of the drama noticeably dragged, and was greatly injured by bombast. The fifth happily repaired all deficiencies, and the halo of the scaffold hides the errors of ambition. But at present our only concern is to give a simple, tender, faithful portraiture of her humble first attempts.

Mme. Roland might have lived on to the end in the sphere which fate at first ordained her, and not have seemed greatly out of place. Her friends, while regretting her narrow circumstances, would never have dreamed of transporting her to that stormy region where she breathed so freely and died so victoriously. And yet she was the same then as afterwards; only her consummate moral nature could rule itself so well that she did not seem under constraint. The interest we feel in obscure lives depends on our power of divining and tracing out the character and genius which are destined one day to illuminate the world, but which might just as easily have remained hid. "How many a Hampden," says Gray in his "Country Churchyard," "sleeps unknown beneath the sod!" I have sometimes tried to imagine what Cardinal Richelieu would have been if fate had restricted him to private life. What a disagreeable neighbor; or, to speak vulgarly, what a

bad bed-fellow! Bonaparte, just before '95, suggests a similar idea — when he is without employment, endeavoring to quench with a few whiffs Bourrienne or Mme. Permon. How rare are the beings who are both good and excellent in private life, and great in public life, like Washington and Mme. Roland!

One precaution is needful in approaching these letters. To avoid misunderstanding, we should call to mind something of the habits and aims of the young girl who penned them. In some respects, and in very many of their pages, they are like recitations in rhetoric and philosophy to which we seem to be listening. The young Phlipon, in her hunger for knowledge, and with the instinct of genius, read all sorts of authors, kept a list of them, made extracts, and discussed them elaborately with her friends; "for," as she very sensibly says, "we learn nothing when we only read. We must extract and convert, so to speak, into our own substance the things we would preserve, until we become penetrated with their essence." Rare and vigorous mind, to which everything came naturally, even the education which she gave herself! She alludes in her Memoirs to what she used very properly to call her extracts, her *maiden* productions, of which these letters are the complement. Now it is a treatise on metaphysics that she analyzes; now Delolme in twelve pages (which is rather too much); now she attempts a prose elegy. There are flourishes in her style. Circumlocutions accounted elegant, and dictionary epithets like the "bells of folly," the "docile pupil of the indolent Epicurean," and the "playful children of laughter," abound at intervals. "You know," she one day writes to her friend, "that my home is on the banks

of the Seine, near the extremity of that island where may be seen the statue of the *best of kings*. The river flows peacefully on the right, bearing past my dwelling its *wholesome waves*." No doubt this is a musical beginning for a description of the corner of the Quai des Lunettes; but we regret that the editor had not considerably condensed this elementary portion, which has no interest save as a sample. It would have enhanced the charm of many of those incidental sketches that are so fresh and free. In the third letter from the preceding, she alludes very prettily to the prosy life she is leading at Vincennes with her uncle the canon, in the midst of the choristers. "The moment the good canon smites the old bass-viol with his quivering bow, I begin to scrape a violin; a second canon accompanies us on a squeaking flute, and a concert ensues fit to terrify the cats. This fine performance over, the gentlemen congratulate themselves and compliment one another, while I escape to the garden to gather roses and parsley, or take a turn in the poultry-yard, where the brooding hens are a subject of interest, and the young chickens divert me. Then I turn over in my mind all the novels and histories I have ever read, to revive my torpid imagination, and divert my thoughts from the conversation of the chapter, which sometimes puts me to sleep. This is my life." And a little farther on: "I like this tranquillity, broken only by the crowing of the cocks. I seem to realize my being; I have a sense of comfort, like that of a tree taken out of a box and transplanted into an open field." Here we have a very different style; or, rather, there is no longer any question of style. The pupil has finished her recitation in rhetoric, and is talking with us.

Nevertheless, it must be owned that the publication in full of these letters does not seem entirely to have violated the intention of their maiden author. In more than one instance she is clearly thinking of the use which may be made of her words. We detect a tip of the author's ear. If, unhappily, a letter miscarries, there are infinite research and regret. Is she quite serious when she speaks of her "scribblings?" "And then what matters it how we write? When I compose my letters (she does compose them then), do I expect that they will find an editor when I am gone, and take rank with those of Mme. de Sévigné? I am not so foolish. If we preserve our scribblings, it is that we may laugh over them when we are toothless." And yet, amid the most confidential and tender confessions of a heart which believes itself won, we find the following: "Open the letter — read it — think of my tortures and of his, and consider whether you ought to send it. But on no account burn anything. Were my letters one day to be read by all the world, I would not shroud in obscurity the sole monument of my weakness and my love." Well, then, since we are allowed, and even invited, let us penetrate into the interior of this virginal heart, to which she has been pleased to afford us a clew.

The unity of this correspondence, the effect of which would have been heightened by a little repression, lies in the friendship of two young girls — in that friendship, impassioned at the outset, at least on the part of Mlle. Phlipon, and which, on being transferred from the convent, with its petty storms, its every-day interests, its ups and downs, runs its course in a few years, and expires with marriage. When I say *expires*, however,

I speak only of its intense and ardent form. The substance always remained. Even before the passion of her friendship was over we find it suffering a check, and it undergoes a perfectly sensible modification towards the close of the first volume, the moment the earliest sentiment of love effects a lodgment in her hitherto undivided heart. But we must condense, as much as possible, the story of these early years, and proceed lightly and rapidly. Mlle. Philipon, at eighteen, had long been formed, and was already a devotee. The letters of 1772, to Sophie, are so serious as to provoke a smile. We feel that the young writer is fresh from Nicole, and that she has not yet read Rousseau. "She was *prevented*," she says ("prevented by grace" — this is Nicole's style), "a little later than her friend." Up to the age of eleven she lived by a species of reason, though still folded in the shades of infancy. Not until then did the divine ray first shine. Nevertheless, vanity, that mighty and detestable enemy, is not overcome. "I call it detestable, and I detest it, too, and with good reason, for it plays me many an ugly trick. 'Tis a cunning thief that always manages to snatch something. Let us unite our forces, my dear friend, and make war upon it. I swear it an implacable hostility. Let us track it in all its windings," &c. There follows a complete little harangue, in which she preaches a holy crusade against the *abominable me*. Saint François de Sales, who has the air of allowing a few gewgaws to girls in view of an honorable marriage, strikes her as too indulgent. She enumerates and confesses, in excellent didactic style, her own thorny conflicts in the matter of vanity. "Here, my friend, you have a faithful picture of the revolutions whereof my

heart was the theatre." This semi-Jansenist phase will not last long. We can trace in her correspondence the decline of this once so fervid devotion. In March, 1776, she still repeats her *stations*, but cannot be resigned to the five Paters and the five Aves. In September of the same year, the Amiens friends are praying for her conversion. She has long been busy with what she calls her "freaks of reasoning." "I am interested in the idea of universality, and the fair chimera (if it be a chimera) of utility allures and intoxicates me." She estimates her recent devotion philosophically, and accounts for it as follows: "Persons of tender heart and thoughtful mind always begin so." On the other hand, her ideal fondness for the pious and indulgent Sophie is in no degree impaired.

Austere, active, diligent, studious, passing from Plutarch to the Abbé Nollet, and from geometry to her household duties,¹ the youthful Philipon, in her nineteenth year, did not always escape a certain dreamy melancholy, which she never thought to exorcise, and which it pleased her to confound with regret for her absent friend. If, on a Sunday in early May, after hearing the convent mass, she took a stroll with her mother in the Luxembourg, she fell into reverie. The silence and calm pervading the gardens, then rural and solitary, were broken for her only by the soft quiv-

¹ And also to the family calling. Her father was an artist and engraver. She sometimes labored to become one. Her drawings are perfection. M. Courtois (son of the member of the Convention) has a very fine drawing of hers, the lines of which show a great deal of power, and also some engraved stones, particularly a coral, after the antique, representing a shepherd wrestling with a goat.

ering of the agitated leaves. She longed for her Sophie during this delicious walk, and the succeeding letters are pervaded by a deeper tinge of sentiment — a great word in those days, and one which indicates the prevailing hue of the last half of the eighteenth century. But native gayety and the joy of strength and innocence soon corrected her languor, and restored her poise and calm. Even when repeating a rustic ode, after Thomson, and moralizing on the control of the passions, she added, with beautiful gravity, “I find in my religion the true path to happiness; when I am submissive to its precepts my life is auspicious. I sing of my God, my blessings, my friend. I praise them to my guitar. In short, I am happy.” It was still early spring with her — the first week of the heart’s May.

A visit of Sophie to Paris and the small pox cause an interruption in the correspondence. The small pox, before its ravages were checked, used commonly to come to young girls as a symptom of their entrance into the age of emotion. To the physical constitution it was a terrible judgment of nature, putting every charm to the test. Mlle. Phlipon arose from it with a beauty that, henceforth, had nothing to fear, and had scarcely recovered from her long convalescence when emulous admirers began to present themselves, whom she dazzled ever more and more. “From the moment,” she says, in her *Memoirs*, “when a girl attains her development, a swarm of suitors attends her footsteps, like the bees that buzz about an opening flower.” But, though she employs this graceful image, her tone is uniformly satirical, and she is very entertaining on the subject of this general uprising of her lovers, whom

she causes to defile before us, and shows off with an air of vast enjoyment. She is like one of those heroines of Jean Jacques whom he was so fond of locating in the Pays de Vaud, — a Claire d'Orbe in her innocent raillery. She is less facetious in her letters than in her Memoirs, for her suitors come one at a time; and since there is more than one whose request may prove a serious matter, she appears occasionally quite preoccupied. In her inmost heart they vex and irritate, as much as they will, subsequently, amuse her. "My sentiments strike me as very odd," she says. "What can be stranger than for me to hate any one because he loves me, and from the moment I try to love him? Yet so it is. I am giving you a faithful record of my experience." The letters to Sophie, in these moments of subtle confidence, become more rapid and animated. They suggest contending impulses and incentives. Mere friendship is but their occasion and pretext — a wavering, agitated veil. Some undefined and bashful consciousness is working in the depths of her heart. "But I am not always capable of application. I have had recent experience of this. I snatched a pen and drew your portrait to divert my mind. I keep it carefully. I added, by way of inscription, 'The portrait of Sophie.' When my head aches all I can do is to scribble! I write everything that occurs to me, and it clears my brain. Adieu! I am expecting a cousin to take me out walking. My imagination dances — my pen runs wild — my senses are thrilled — my feet burn. Wholly thine."

However intrinsically calm and healthy one may be, it would seem difficult, in the rush of youthful thoughts and feelings, and amid so many moving solicitations,

to remain utterly cold. Accordingly the moment came when Mlle. Philpon gave forth a spark. Who, then, was the chosen one, the first mortal she ever met who crossed, though but for a moment, the still inviolate ideal of her noble heart?

Among her suitors there were men of all sorts and all professions, from the diamond merchant to the doctor and the academician, the grocer and the restaurant-keeper; and it must be owned, as the merry maiden herself said, that if this more or less amorous suite could have been represented in a picture, each with the attributes of his profession, like the stage Turks in a certain famous ceremony, the result would have been a singular medley. Yet she was not always jesting; and her one softened and serious moment, by no means very violent or stormy, but sufficiently tender, and somewhat embellished in description, the correspondence does actually indicate.

There is a great deal said, in her *Memoirs*, of La Blancherie, a sort of author and philosopher who early subsided into twaddle, and even into philanthropic brokerage. She passes a superficial judgment on him, and, after some sort of natural digression, she returns to the subject, saying, lightly, "Let us settle the claims of this individual:" but before being settled by her, he had succeeded in making himself beloved; and better proof could not be furnished if required that there is nothing in love save what we put into it, and that the object of the flame counts in reality for almost nothing. This spirited and sensible girl, with an imagination singularly chaste and austere, distinguishes, from the very first, one who is a complete epitome of the follies and affectations of his day, and fancies she sees in him a realization of her most alluring dream. The fact is, that La

Blanchérie, that *young sage*, the friend of Greuze, with his verses and his theories, and his moral advice to parents, represented to perfection the commonplace philosophic or sentimental romanticism of his time, as it was in its glory. Romanticism, however, is very likely to succeed for once, and in some form or other, with the heart of a young girl, even were that young girl destined to become Mme. Roland. The letters to Sophie, therefore, are full of this grave crisis in her interior life. Postscripts, added without her mother's knowledge, multiply and extend. The little light closet where she writes no longer appears sufficiently secure from surprise. "No answer — none at least that would be intelligible to any beside myself. Adieu! my heart throbs at the slightest noise. I tremble like a thief." All is, her friend must believe herself, at such a time, more necessary, more beloved, more precious than ever. With what an agony of impatience her replies are awaited! If the wished-for letter arrive during the family dinner, there is no help for it — it must be opened at once, before them all; and she forgets that she is not alone, and sheds tears; and then her parents smile, and grandmamma speaks the word that is in all their minds. "If you had a husband and children, this friendship would soon vanish, and you would forget Mlle. Cannel." And then the young girl, who gives a ravishing account of this domestic scene, revolts, as one might suppose she would, at such an idea. "It surprises me to find that so many people regard friendship as a frivolous or chimerical sentiment. Almost every one seems to imagine that the lightest emotion of another sort is capable of changing and effacing friendships, which they consider the mere makeshifts of an

unoccupied heart. Do you believe, Sophie, that any change of circumstances would break the tie between us?" This word "break" is a hard one, certainly, but why is it, O maiden, that your friendship seems intensified in those moments when you have some peculiarly tender avowal to make? Why, after a second interview with him, whom you avoid naming, one day when he has caused you to read the proof-sheets of an instructive work which he has just completed, and you are perfectly transported by the discovery that the author, if he is not Rousseau, has, at least, in him something of Grenze, why do you conclude your letter to your friend in such an impassioned strain — "Receive my tears of emotion and the hot kiss that has fallen upon these last lines"? Whence came that burning kiss which suddenly makes its first appearance here? Is not original friendship undergoing a change? And why, afterwards, when a new situation has been fully established, — when a marriage, not of passion, but of reason, is soon to end her dreams, — why is the last letter of the correspondence precisely the one in which this announcement is made? When grandmamma delivered her La Bruyère-like oracle, she went a little too far, perhaps; but was she not half right?

This sentiment for La Blancherie may not absolutely deserve the name of love, nor quite meet our idea of the prime passion of such a soul, but still it transcends the bounds of common interest. Mme. Roland, in her *Memoirs*, regarding it from a distance and in perspective, has, doubtless, to some extent curtailed its proportions. Here we have it displayed in greater amplitude. It was a conspicuous advantage to La Blancherie, at first, that he was not seen often, nor for long at a time.

He was often at Orleans, and seldom came to the house after the death of Mme. Roland's mother: M. Phlipon, the father, had little fancy for him, and he was requested to abate his visits. These eclipses — this twilight atmosphere — enhanced his brilliancy. Our heroine, whom I have compared above to one of the characters in the *Nouvelle Héloïse*, had become very like a certain enamoured lady in Corneille, when she thinks of her fond and virtuous absent one. When La Blancherie, whom she no longer had the opportunity to see frequently, is desecrated at church, on the occasion of a funeral service performed for her dear mother a year after her death, "You may imagine," she writes to her friend, "the emotion caused me by his presence at such a ceremony. I blushed for those criminal tears which flowed at once for my mother and my lover. Heavens! what a word! But need they have shamed me? No: reassured by the rectitude of my own feelings, I take thee to witness, dear and sacred shade!" We recognize the tone to which she has risen; it is like that in the sublime scene, —

"Adieu, trop malheureux et trop parfait amant!"¹

Elsewhere, still after the manner of Pauline, she speaks of the *surprise of her senses* at the sight of La Blancherie; but the probability is that there was no such surprise in the case, and that the affair was one of sentiment merely. The first check which La Blancherie sustained arose from her one day meeting him in the Luxembourg with a feather in his hat. A philosopher in a feather! Some trivial stories told of him helped to compromise her ideal, and the matter became serious. "You cannot

¹ Adieu, my too unhappy and too perfect lover.

think how strange it seems to me. His features, though the same, have no longer the same expression, and do not indicate the same qualities. O, how powerful is illusion! I still rate him above common men, and especially above those of his own age; but he is no more an idol of perfection, no longer the first of his species, — in short, no longer my lover.” These few passages, taken from her letters, in connection with some pages of the *Memoirs*, furnish a pointed lesson concerning the false light which pervades the heart’s perspectives.

The last scene in particular, where La Blancherie appeared so different from what she had supposed him, but at the close of which she still regarded him with generous esteem — that slightly mysterious interview of four hours’ duration — is described in her *Memoirs* with an inaccuracy of remembrance very thoughtless and slightly cruel. It would seem from the *Memoirs* that she dismissed La Blancherie with something very like the air of a queen, while it appears from the letter to Sophie that, hearing the approach of a visitor, she made him a slight motion with her hand to withdraw by one door while she went to receive her guest at the other, — “assuming,” she says, “her most playful manner, in order to conceal her adroit stratagem.” Are, then, these conflicting statements with regard to past impressions inevitable, even in the case of our most sincere emotions?

It may be, — for so nice a matter demands careful scrutiny, — it may be that the letter to Sophie tells but a part of the truth; perhaps she was sterner and more scornful with La Blancherie than she dares confess to her confidant; because her vanity was wounded by the memory

of the past. I fear, however, that it is the *Memoirs* which (in condensing into a single scene the result of subsequent judgments) have unceremoniously misrepresented, what in the retrospect she had long despised.

And, after all, where is the autobiographer who could bear to have the subsequent story of his experience compared, at all points, with his contemporary letters.

This sentiment, even as she afterwards represented it, — the loss of her mother, her varied reading, her relations with some few men of mark, — all combined, when she was about twenty-two, to give her vigorous mind such an impulse and scope, that her power was fully revealed even to her own contracted circle. In vain she repeats, as often as possible, and with consummate grace, “I live in the shade. Twilight suffices for my happiness; and, as Montaigne says, “one is never so well off as in the back shop.” With her strong nature and superior endowments, she often felt cramped behind the screen and in the *entresol* to which fate confined her. Her life overflows. She compares herself to a caged lion. She should have been a Spartan or Roman woman, or, at least, a man in France. We venture to quote the expression of a desire which certain famous heroines have since realized. “Come, then, to Paris,” she writes to the gentle and pious Sophie; “there is nothing like residence in a place where art and science, the presence of great men, and all sorts of intellectual resources, concur and vie with one another. How interesting it would be for us to study and walk together! How I desire to know men of ability of every sort! Sometimes I feel tempted to don a hat and breeches, for the sake of being free to look about and discover what is best in all orders of talent. I have

heard tales of women assuming such a disguise from motives of affection or self-sacrifice. Ah, if I were a little less rational, or circumstances were a little more in my favor, I swear that I have the requisite zeal. I am not surprised that Christina should have abandoned her throne for the sake of living peacefully with her beloved arts and sciences. Yet, if I were a queen, I would sacrifice my tastes to the duty of making my people happy. I would, indeed; but what a sacrifice! And so the fact that I wear no crown does not greatly trouble me, although my means are limited. What random talk! I love you all the same as Henry IV. loved Crillon. Adieu." Her friendship for Sophie, and the letters she writes during the first months of 1776, gain by this crowd of conflicting emotions. She herself confesses as much, and gives us the key to her great increase of tenderness. "Ah, Sophie! Sophie! you can judge how fully I appreciate the blessing of friendship, when I tell you it is the only sentiment I am free to indulge."

But Sophie alone did not suffice her even for friendship. Towards the middle of the same year (1776) a slight decline is perceptible; we hear some faint reproaches — "Sophie, Sophie, your letters are long delayed." While on the one side there were dreams of La Blancherie, on the other, at Amiens, there were thoughts of the cloister. Sophie had had a passing desire to become a *religieuse*. The two friends no longer inhabited quite the same world. They make peace, they return with ardor to their mutual love, but still it is a return, for in the career of friendship, as in the path of virtue, we retrograde the moment we cease to advance. I use Mme. Roland's own words. Hen-

riette, the elder sister of Sophie, came to Paris to pass some months, and made a third in their intimacy. Her vivacious imagination and brilliant wit appear to great advantage beside the languor of her younger sister. At any rate our heroine's heart becomes divided. Henriette becomes a third self, and the ensuing letters are addressed to the two sisters jointly. M. Roland, also, begins to appear at rare intervals — an austere man, who, at first, inspires considerable awe. These things suffice to effect a diversion. They are mixed up with the details of private annoyances and domestic troubles. The correspondence, like human life, loses its unity as it proceeds.

But its literary ability increases. The maiden is now an able woman, mistress of her pen as well as her heart, and the play of thought and movement of composition obey her bidding. In what are to me the most interesting portions of the correspondence the editor is sure to make numerous erasures. I can imagine the difficulties and the scruples which may arise when the materials in hand are so rich, but I think the interest of the book depended largely on the compiler's preserving a kind of unity in his selection. He needed to shun both the diffuse and the fragmentary, and especially to keep a watchful eye upon the *Memoirs*, for the purpose of abridging those portions which are only a sort of duplication.

A postscript to the correspondence, accompanied by full details on the part of the editor, is worthy to close and crown the whole. I have alluded to Henriette, the elder sister, the second and more brilliant of Mme. Roland's two friends. '93 had come, and years of absence and political difference had loosened, without sunder-

ing the ties that united the old playmates. Mme. Roland was a captive beneath the bolts of Sainte-Pélagie, awaiting sentence and the scaffold. Henriette hastened to her rescue. She wanted to change clothes with her, and remain a prisoner in her stead. "But they would kill you, my dear Henriette," persisted the noble victim; and she would not consent.

Apart from the little romance which I have endeavored to separate from the rest of the book and make prominent, the reader will find in these volumes many a pleasant anecdote and item characteristic of the age. It was quite natural that the enthusiastic girl should have had a passionate desire to see and know Rousseau. She thought she had discovered a way. A Genoese, a friend of her father, had to propose to his illustrious countryman the composition of a few musical airs. She begged to be honored by the commission. Behold her, then, writing a beautiful letter to the philosopher of the Rue Plâtrière, in which she said that she would come in person for his answer. Two days later she set out with her maid, entered the shoemaker's alley, and tremulously climbed the stairs, as if they had been the steps of a temple. But it was Thérèse who opened the door and replied "no" to every question, keeping, all the while, her hand upon the lock. It was certainly better that she never saw Rousseau, — the supreme object of her worship, — for so the faiths of the intellect are best preserved.

Upon the wise and genial Boismorel, who plays so pleasant a part in the *Memoirs*, on Sevelinges, the academician,¹ on a certain Genoese, a man of heavier make,

¹ She calls him so, vol. ii. p. 107.

“whose mind is like a dark lantern, shedding light only on him who holds it;” on all these acquaintances of hers, whom she speedily makes our own, she bestows bright glances and remarks that indicate acute observation, and are almost as delightful as conversation itself. We obtain a peculiarly clear idea of one mature and very devoted friend of hers — M. de Sainte-Lette, who came from Pondicherry, and afterwards returned to that place, whose knowledge of the world was great, who had experienced passion, who regretted his youth, who was, above all, an atheist. The atheist was a production of the eighteenth century. He took rank as such. His unbelief was almost a profession. When an individual was discovered to possess this quality, he was regarded with a species of horror not unmixed with fascination. People communicated the fact to their friends, mysteriously, as did our heroine in the case of M. de Wolmar and M. de Sainte-Lette. Three quarters of the people of our day believe in nothing after the grave, and still never suspect that they are atheists. They go on at hap-hazard, in perfect unconcern, and excite no particular remark. Is not ours really the worse situation of the two? and does not the incredulous solemnity of the eighteenth century prove that the men of that day were nearer faith than we?

M. Roland makes his appearance early with a letter of introduction from the Amiens friends; but his character is not readily divined. From the beginning, she who is destined to shed historic lustre on his name is anxious for his esteem, and takes pains to appear to advantage in his presence; but the intellect only is involved; it is a question of esteem merely. During these important visits they talk of everything — the

Abbé Raynal, Rousseau, Voltaire, Switzerland, government, the Greeks and Romans; they glance by turns at all these serious subjects. For the most part they are tolerably harmonious, but the name of Raynal is a warmly contested battle-field. M. Roland, with the common sense of an economist, allows himself to pronounce the philosophic historian of the two Indies an unmethodical charlatan, whose heavy volumes are fit only for wrapping paper. The enthusiastic maiden cries out upon him. She defends Raynal as she would defend Rousseau. She cannot as yet discriminate between the two. Her taste is still confused. In matters of style she has not yet assigned to its proper place what is only of La Blancherie. So at every epoch we have the declamatory side by side with the original, and the two are easily confounded even by intelligent contemporaries. Campistron's best borders on Racine's weakest, and Raynal often suggests Rousseau. Time alone makes clear and permanent distinctions. This is true even of the works of the really original writer, who has catered too much to the taste of his disciples, and yielded too much to the desire of excessive applause. From these pages, which contemporary eyes, affected by the same disease, and tinged with the same jaundiced hue, as the author's own, admire as among his finest, and which are lauded with a kind of complacent unanimity, Time, with his humid wing, soon brushes away the ephemeral, and leaves in the very midst of the objects portrayed great disfiguring patches, which increase the effect of permanence about the few truthful and uninjured tints. The eye readily lights upon such blemishes in these volumes of Mme. Roland's letters. Hers are the platitudes of her age, and they are

atoned for by the countless marks of originality, whose freshness and grace they do but enhance.

The four or five years which elapsed between the death of her mother and her marriage with M. Roland brought her many hard and poignant, and, at the same time, petty trials. Her father was harassed, and on the road to ruin. She had glimpses of the truth, and longed to know all, while yet she must smile on her father and on the world, and dissimulate her anxiety. "I should prefer the whistling of spears and the horrors of battle," she sometimes cried, "to the dull sound of the shafts that are tearing my heart; but it is the sage's struggle with fate." She was fresh from Plutarch and Seneca when she uttered this stoical sentiment; but she had read Homer as well, and declared with a smile, and in imagery less forced than the above, "Gayety sometimes pierces through my anxieties like a sun-ray through the clouds. I shall have great need of philosophy to enable me to sustain the conflicts that are coming. I am like Ulysses clinging to the fig-tree; I wait for the ebb tide to restore me to my ship."

M. Roland, who had been travelling in Italy, returns by way of Paris, but he does not visit her very regularly, and she is a little piqued. Once she dreams of him as completely ruined. She writes this to the sisters very dryly. Decidedly this is a busy man, not lavish of his pains. She who is so ready to draw portraits of her friends feels no confidence about attempting his. She observes him *through too long a telescope*, and for all she sees of him he might still be in Italy. We do not talk thus of those to whom we are indifferent. It is taken as a good sign by M. Roland, who is a careful observer, possibly a little doubtful of success,

but otherwise not unnecessarily anxious, and who advances warily, slow, and sure, like reason and destiny. But for my own part, I perceive that I am falling into an error with which I have already been reproached, and encroaching upon the dull and prosaic zone of life.

In all this portion of the correspondence, the tone of which has become very grave, in the midst of domestic vicissitudes and the sorrows that always beset the existence of a woman when she ceases to be a girl, there comes out, in ever bolder relief, one quality which is beyond all praise. An indescribably healthful, honorable, courageous spirit breathes through these pages. "Action! Action!" is her cry. "Most true it is," she is fond of repeating, "that the principle of good resides solely in that precious activity which rescues us from nullity, and fits us for anything that may arise. This love of labor, which she practically applied, brought her esteem, virtue, happiness,—all needful support in life and in death. It is because the last generation of the traduced eighteenth century believed firmly in those principles of which Mme. Roland in her purity and heroism offers us the worthiest illustration, because it was more or less fed and formed upon these, that in the frightful agonies which ensued, our nation, though shaken to its foundations, did not perish.

November 15, 1840.

V.

MADAME DE STAËL.

AFTER a revolution that has changed the aspect of society, when the final plunge has been fairly made, it is interesting to turn and look back, and see how on the heights around the horizon certain grand figures stand isolated and steadfast, like the statues of local divinities. This personification of the genius of a time by its illustrious individuals, though doubtless favored by remoteness, is no mere illusion of perspective. Distance throws into complete and bold relief these points of view, but does not create them. Each moment in the history of society has its natural and proper representatives; but with the lapse of time their number fast diminishes, details are simplified, and one commanding head remains alone. Corinne, viewed from our short distance, is clearest outlined upon Cape Miseno.

The French Revolution, which never wanted great men at any of its crises, had also its heroic and brilliant women, whose names are severally appropriate to its successive aspects. The old social *régime*, as it passed away, had its female captives, its virgin martyrs, crowned with undying glory in the dungeon and on the scaffold. The citizen class, as it arose, early produced its own heroines and its own victims. Later

still, before the storm has wholly ceased, groups of women leap into distinction, who celebrate the epoch of a return to social life, luxury, and pleasure. The Empire, too, had its feminine notabilities, although their influence at that time was slight; while the Restoration shows us a few names of superior women, which represent the best aspect of its manners, and its nicely-discriminated shades of opinion. But these successive reputations, illustrative of the different phases of the Revolution, meet, and are in some sort comprehended, in a single fame which reconciles and unites them all; sharing in their every element of brilliancy and self-devotion, polish and power, sentiment, virility, dignity, wit, and inspiration, while rising superior to them all, and adding to this array of gifts the consummate genius which confers worth and immortality. Connected by paternal descent with the party of reform, Mme. de Staël is saved from one-sidedness by having received her education and passed her first youth in the drawing-rooms of the old school. The personages among whom she grew up, and who smiled on her precocious efforts, all belong to the most intellectual circle of the latest years of the bygone time. Reading, in 1810, at the period of her severest persecutions, the correspondence of Mme. du Deffand and Horace Walpole, she found herself strangely affected by the memory of that great world, every family and most of the individuals of which she had known so well. If she made herself conspicuous on her first appearance by a slight excess of animation and sentiment, criticised by certain envious aristocrats, it was because she was destined, wherever she went, to carry the same impulsive, unstudied manner. Even while

she remained in that tranquil circle, her life was one of its most decided ornaments; and she was to continue, under a less formal and grandiose aspect, that succession of *salons* which had rendered the old French society illustrious. There lingered then with Mme. de Staël just enough of the style and charm of former days; but she was not tenacious of this heritage, for, like most geniuses, and more eminently than any other, she was distinguished by the universality of her intelligence, her need of change and renewal, her vast capacity for love. The traditional and already classic triumphs of Mme. du Deffand and Mme. de Beauveau she had kept up in her own fashion, varying them by the originality of her genius; but none the less did she sympathize with the new-born energy, the plebeian genius, the manly strength, of republican souls. The heroic careers of Mme. Roland and Charlotte Corday found in her heart a ready and warm response, which involved no failure in the delicate tenderness of her other noble friendships. True sister of André Chénier in her instinct of self-sacrifice, she uttered an eloquent cry for the queen, as he for Louis XVI., and would have defended her at the bar, if so she could have saved her. But she soon yielded; and in her book on the Influence of the Passions, she speaks, with all the sadness of a righteous stoicism, of these times of oppression, when one can only die. During the period of the Directory, her writings and conversation assume a severer tone, though never to the exclusion of the qualities above mentioned. She upholds the cause of philosophy, of perfectibility, of a moderate and free republic, just as the widow of Condorcet might have done. It was then, or shortly after,

in the preface to Literature considered with Reference to Social Institutions, that she gave utterance to this masculine thought: "A few of Plutarch's lives, one of Brutus's letters to Cicero, passages from Addison's Cato, — such things revive a spirit depressed by contemporary events." Nor is she at this very moment in any degree unable to welcome and enjoy the amenities of the old school, as they reappear under the conditions of exile. All the while she appreciates and enjoys in her heart her own fame, as the most popular, the most gifted, and the purest woman of her day. She surrounds herself with this as with a garland, while the letters of Brutus remain open before her, and M. de Montmorency smiles upon her with pity. Thus the intellectual stimulus of the *salons* of the eighteenth century, the vigor of new hopes and mighty enterprises, the sadness of a stoical patriotism, the memory of graceful courtesies, and the impulse to modern elegance, wrought simultaneously or successively upon a soul as many-sided as it was truly complete. And subsequently, on her return to France after the overthrow of the Empire, during the too brief remnant of her life, she was one who seized with the same aptitude on the idea of needful concessions; and her more and more frequent association in her last days with persons like Mme. de Duras imparted the final tint to an existence which took color from every social phase through which it passed, from the semi-philosophic and revolutionary *salon* of her mother, down to the liberal royalism of the Restoration. From this point of view, the existence of Mme. de Staël, in its entirety, seems a mighty empire, which, like that other conqueror, her contemporary and her oppressor,

she strove unceasingly to extend and complete. But hers is no material struggle. Her tireless activity does not covet and annex province after province, and realm after realm. It is the domain of her mind that she is ever extending; it is the multiplicity of lofty ideas, profound sentiments, and enviable relations, which she endeavors to organize within and around her. Yes; throughout the whole of her potent life, by virtue of her ready sympathy and her impetuous curiosity, she aspired to hold a vast court, to sway a growing empire of intellect and affection, where nothing graceful or valuable should be overlooked; where all the grades of talent, birth, patriotism, beauty, should receive due homage beneath her eye; where, like an empress of thought, she could enclose every appanage within her free domains. When Bonaparte struck her down, he aimed confusedly at that rivalry which she affected, without acknowledging to herself that she did so.

The predominant characteristic of Mme. de Staël, the main unity of all the contrasts of her character, the swift, keen spirit which circulated through every member of that vast assemblage, and vivified the whole, was, beyond a doubt, a genius for conversation, for sudden improvisation, springing, all divine, from the unfailing fountain of her soul. This, properly speaking, constituted her *life* — a magical word, which she employs very frequently, and which he who would speak of her must use with equal freedom. Her contemporaries are unanimous upon this point. It is with her as with the great Athenian orator. You pay the tribute of your admiration or your emotion to the powerful or glowing page; but the question always recurs, "What would this have been if I had heard

it?" Foes and critics, who are ever eager to offset one superior quality against another in the case of any great individual whom they find too perfect,¹ who oppose the talent claimed by a certificate of the talent already proved, pay to Mme. de Staël in this respect a tribute, which, though selfish and slightly perfidious, is fully equal to that of her admirers. Fontanes, in 1800, closed his famous articles in the *Mercur*e with these words: "When she writes, she fancies that she is still conversing. Those who hear applaud her constantly. I was not listening to her when I criticised." In fact, the writings of Mme. de Staël long continued to show traces of her conversational habits. There are marks of negligence, roughnesses of language, a certain hastiness allowable in conversation, but conspicuous in composition, which remind us that she has changed her form of expression for one which demands increased care. But, however marked the superiority and even the præminence of Mme. de Staël's conversational over her written style, or, at least, over that of her earlier works, her case is not that of the great extemporaneous orators, the Mirabeaus and Diderots, who, somewhat like Talma, attained to regal honors, and have left behind them mighty names, but whose literary remains are entirely inadequate to the reputation they achieved and the effect they produced. She has left a sufficient number of enduring works to witness of her worthily; nor will she need, in the presence of posterity, any apology of strangers or *cortège* of contemporary reminiscences. Possibly, as M. de

¹ "Sed mos est hominum ut nolint eundem pluribus rebus excellere," says Cicero. All the more if we read *eandem* instead of *eundem*.

Chateaubriand remarked when he passed judgment on Mme. de Staël just before her death, it would have been necessary, in order to render her writings perfect, to deprive her of a single talent — that of conversation. Still, her actual rank as a writer is sufficiently distinguished. “For all her faults of manner,” says M. de Chateaubriand in the same place, “she adds one more to the names that will not die.” Her works, in short, through the very imperfection of many of their details, their rapid succession of thoughts, and the sweep of their movement, become in many cases all the better transcript of her subtile thought, her panting and agitated soul; while, as a poem and a work of art, the romance of *Corinne* alone would constitute an immortal monument. Artist of a high order by virtue of *Corinne*, Mme. de Staël remains eminent also in other departments — as a politician, a moralist, a critic, and an author of memoirs. It is her life in its unity and variety, the fragrance of her soul arising through her works, yet circling round and pervading all the circumstances of their composition, which we would fain attempt to evoke, and occasionally to condense, in the hope of transmitting to other minds the sensible impression which we have received therefrom. We know how delicate a matter it is to make a partially conjectural and already idealized impression agree with that produced by a still recent reality; how many objections immediate contemporaries always have to urge against the conception we desire to form of the person whom they knew; we know how inevitably it happens in a multifarious and stormy life, that the details mar the effect of that general design which distance enables us to restore: but,

in the first place, this is not so much a biography as a sketch — a reflection of moral portraiture upon literary criticism; and, moreover, in tracing the leading features of this great mind, we have endeavored to take into account many more minute circumstances and recollections than we could conveniently rehearse at length.

Mlle. Germaine Necker, brought up between the somewhat rigid severity of her mother and the now playful and now eloquent encouragements of her father, inclined naturally to the side of the latter, and soon became an infant prodigy.¹ She had her place in the drawing-room on a little wooden stool beside the arm-chair of Mme. Necker, who obliged her to sit upright, but could not repress the child's replies to the celebrated individuals — such as Grimm, Thomas, Raynal, Gibbon, Marmontel — who delighted to surround and challenge her by questions, and who never found her at a loss. Mme. Necker de Saussure has marvellously delineated these graceful first attempts in her excellent notice of her cousin. At that period, Mlle. Necker

¹ The difference to Mlle. Necker between father and mother is admirably illustrated by the following anecdote in the *Memoirs* of Miss Edgeworth, recently printed in England for private circulation: —

“One day, M. Suard, as he entered the saloon of the hôtel Necker, saw Mme. Necker going out of the room, and Mlle. Necker standing in a melancholy attitude, with tears in her eyes. Guessing that Mme. Necker had been lecturing her, Suard went towards her to comfort her, and whispered, ‘One caress from your father will make up for it all!’ Wiping the tears from her eyes, she immediately answered, ‘Ah, yes, monsieur! my father thinks of my present happiness; mamma thinks of my future.’ There was more than presence of mind, there was heart, and soul, and greatness of mind, in this answer.” — *TR.*

used to read books far beyond her years, go to the comedy, and make extracts from it on her return. When still younger, her favorite pastime had been to cut figures of kings and queens out of paper, and cause them to act tragedies. Thus she had her puppets, as Göthe had his. Her dramatic instinct, her proclivity to emotion, and need of expression, are everywhere manifest. At the age of eleven, Mlle. Necker composed portraits and panegyrics, after the fashion of the day. At fifteen, she wrote out extracts from *L'Esprit des Lois*, accompanied by comments. In the same year, 1781, on the appearance of the "Compte Rendu,"¹ she addressed her father in an anonymous letter, the style of which betrayed her. But her most prominent characteristic was that sensibility, which, towards the close of the eighteenth century, and chiefly through the influence of Jean Jacques, became dominant in all young hearts, and offered so strange a contrast to the excessive analysis and pretentious scepticism otherwise distinctive of the epoch. Amid this somewhat disorderly reaction of the soul's instincts, a habit of dreamy melancholy, compassion for the woes of others, enthusiasm for genius, nature, virtue, and misfortune, seized powerfully upon Mlle. Necker, and impressed on all the earlier portion of her life and writings a tone of frank exaggeration which is not without its charm, even when it provokes a smile. This disposition first revealed itself in her enthusiasm for her father—an enthusiasm which time and death only deepened, but which took its rise in those early years. She even went

¹ The Treasury Report for the five years of M. Necker's first ministry, which was published, contrary to all precedent, in 1781. — TR.

the length of seeming at times to be jealous of her mother. In the account she gives, in the life of M. Necker, of her long residence in Paris before her marriage, Mme. de Staël can even say, "Sometimes, when conversing with me in his retreat, he reviewed a period of his life the memory of which deeply moved me — that period when I could picture him to myself so young, so winning, so lonely! that period when our destinies might have been united for eternity, if fate had made us contemporaries!" And farther on, speaking of her mother, "How could she help being unique, when she found him, and spent her days with him? God spared her the sorrow of surviving him. She was more deserving of happiness than I." This worship of Mme. de Staël for her father is the reverse and counterpart of the sentiment of Mme. de Sévigné for her daughter, only more solemn, and certainly no less profound. It is pleasant to meet with these pure and fervid attachments in persons of brilliant mind. In Mme. de Staël's case there is no difficulty whatever in accounting for the enduring warmth of filial devotion. Amid the ruin, which, as she advanced in life, overtook all the illusions of her heart and thought successively, one single mortal — one only of all her old loves — retained his exalted place in her memory, untouched, untainted, without the slightest failure or infidelity to the past; and the immortal and now purified flames of her youthful devotion still played about that august head.

At this her age of exaltation, reverie, romantic situations, thoughts of love and the obstacles it encounters, and of the prevalence of suffering and death, were, next to her singular worship of her father, the most

cherished occupations of this *intense and sorrowful soul*, who *cared for that only which made her weep*. She liked to write on these favorite subjects, and did it by stealth, as she also read certain books which were not of Mme. Necker's selection. I can fancy her in the study, under her mother's eye, the latter seated, she pacing up and down the room, with a volume in each hand, reading by turns the regulation book as she approached her mother, and the sentimental romance—a novel of Mme. Riccoboni's, maybe,—as she slowly withdrew. She used to say afterwards that the abduction of Clarissa Harlowe was one of the events of her youth—a singular but charming remark, suggestive of a whole world of fresh emotion. Every person of tender and poetic imagination can say the same of some Clarissa or other. The most precocious of the printed works of Mlle. Necker (if it be really hers) should be a volume entitled the Letters of Nanine to Simphal, which M. Beuchot seems to attribute to our author, but which was disowned in 1818. There is nothing in this little novel which might not have occurred to the imagination of a high-flown and pure-minded young person; nor is it, in the main, very unlike *Sophie*, *Mirza*, *Pauline*, and her other early productions: but in its style of composition it betrays yet greater inexperience than they. I find nothing very suggestive of the spirit of the age, or the kind of landscape familiar to heroines of fourteen, except these words of Nanine: “I was able, yesterday morning, to visit the grave. There I shed a torrent of those precious tears which emotions of grief induce in the unhappy of my kind. The heavy rain by which I was overtaken made it seem as if Nature sympathized in

my sorrow. Every leaf appeared to weep with me. The birds seemed silenced by my moans. I was so impressed by this idea, that I prayed aloud to God most earnestly. Unable to remain longer in that deserted spot, I returned to hide my grief," &c. *Sophie, ou les Sentiments secrets*, composed at the age of twenty, in 1786, or thereabouts, is a drama in verse, the scene of which is laid in an English garden, within sight of an urn shrouded by cypress and other funereal trees. Cécile, a child of six, approaches the sad Sophie, devoured by her speechless passion, and says, —

“Pourquoi donc loin nous restes-tu maintenant?

Mon père est inquiet.

Sophie.

Ton père?

Cécile.

Mon amie,

Il redoute toi de la mélancolie.

Explique moi ce mot.”¹

Is not this very like Mlle. Necker's once abruptly asking old Marshal Mouchy what he thought of love? — a foolish little incident, over which M. Necker made very merry, and of which his daughter delighted to remind him. In fact, there was, if not in the earlier writings of Mme. de Staël, in herself personally, a union of gayety and sadness, a mingling of melancholy with a certain bright petulance, an aptitude for seizing on what was ridiculous in herself, and doing it full justice, which saved her from all insipidity, and proved that her nature was sound and healthy at the core.

¹ *Cécile.* Why dost thou stay so far away from us? My father is uneasy.

Sophie. Thy father?

Cécile. He suspects thee of melancholy, my friend. Explain that word to me.

In *Sophie* we find these charming lines, which some of the author's contemporaries will readily remember. When we hear them for the first time, we are surprised that we did not know them before; we ask ourselves where in Mme. de Staël they are to be found. We should hardly have dreamed of seeking in her writings for so beautiful and moist a pearl:—

“ Mais un jour vous saurez ce qu'éprouve le cœur
 Quand un vrai sentiment n'en fait pas le bonheur :
 Lorsque sur cette terre on se sent délaissée,
 Qu'on n'est d'aucun objet la première pensée ;
 Lorsque l'on peut souffrir sûre que ses douleurs
 D'aucun mortel jamais ne font couler les pleurs.
 On se désintéresse à la fin de soi-même ;
 On cesse de s'aimer si quelqu'un ne nous aime ;
 Et d'insipides jours, l'un sur l'autre entassés,
 Se passent lentement et sont vite effacés.”¹

Act II., Scene 8.

The three novels published in '95, and composed ten years earlier,—*Mirza*, *Adélaïde et Théodore*, and *Pauline*,—closely resemble *Sophie* in coloring, but their easy prose renders them more attractive. There are always—whether the scene is laid in Africa, among the negroes, or in the depths of one of our English parks—unfortunate individuals enveloped in a mist of sentimentality, lovers whom the fatal tidings of

¹ But you will one day know how the heart feels without the blessing of true love—when we realize that we are alone in the world; when we are first in the thoughts of none; when we may suffer and feel sure that our griefs will cause no mortal's tears to flow. Then, at last, we become disinterested. We cease to love ourselves when no one loves us; and the dull days, linked one to another, pass slowly by, and are soon lost in oblivion.

desertion have reduced to a ghost-like condition. There is always a tomb in the midst of the trees. I fancy, as I read of these evanishings, these untimely deaths, that I am once more associating with the kindred characters of the good Abbé Prevost; or, rather, I actually walk in the groves of Saint-Ouen, where Mlle. Necker wandered and dreamed, or in the gardens of Ermenonville, destined to attract so many pilgrims. I know the kind of alleys in which Mesdames de Montolieu and Cottin and Mme. Desbordes-Valmore used to stray, from what shades they issued in tears. But Mme. de Staël could make but a transient sojourn here at a period of early youth. Subsequently and very soon, smitten by the spectacle of public passions, warned, it may be, by some personal wound, she will react against herself and against this excessive cultivation of sensibility. In her book on the Influence of the Passions, she endeavors to resist their power; she would fain suppress them altogether; but her accusatory accent betrays their presence, and her utterance seems the more agitated from its constraint. All this parade of stoicism soon issues in *Delphine*. Mme. de Staël will remain to the end the most impulsive and the most affectionate of the children of genius.

M. de Guibert has executed a brilliant portrait of Mlle. Necker in her twentieth year, which is quoted by Mme. Necker de Saussure. The piece is supposed to be translated from a Greek poet, and very well illustrates the prevailing taste of the day, the era of the *New Anacharsis*.¹ We have, as is well known, por-

¹ Baron Jean Baptist Cloutz, commonly called Anacharsis Cloutz, was born at Cleves in 1755, and adopted the name of the Scythian philosopher from a supposed similarity in their missions

traits of the Duke and Duchess de Choiseul by the Abbé Barthélemy, under the names of Arsamus and Phedima. We present some of the features of that of Zulma by M. de Guibert: "Zulma is but twenty years old, and she is the most celebrated of the priestesses of Apollo—the one whose incense is sweetest, and her songs most acceptable to him. . . . Her large black eyes beamed with the light of genius. Her ebony hair fell in wavy curls upon her shoulders. Her features were rather marked than delicate, and suggested something beyond the destiny of her sex." I have myself seen a portrait of Mlle. Necker, painted when she was very young. It is much the same—the hair thin and slightly puffed, the eye confident and full of light, the forehead high, the lips parted as if in speech, somewhat full, in token of intelligence and good nature, the complexion warm with feeling, the neck and arms bare, the dress light, with a ribbon floating at the waist, the chest heaving with the deep-drawn breath. Such was the Sophie of the *Emile*; such the author of the Letters on Jean Jacques, as she accompanied her admirable guide into his Elysium, becoming more excited at every step, coming and going restlessly, sometimes at his side, sometimes in advance.

The Letters on Jean Jacques, composed in 1787, are, in fact, Mme. de Staël's first work, that from which we

—he being destined to reform the world, as Anacharsis the rude manners of his barbarous countrymen. He figured conspicuously among the boldest of the French Atheists at the time of the revolution, preached with fervor the worship of Reason and the universal brotherhood of the race, and perished by the guillotine along with Hébert, Vincent, Rosnin, and others, on the 24th of March, 1794. — TR.

must date in her case, wherein the powers which hitherto had been but vaguely tried come out in the full panoply of their eloquence and might. Grimm, in his Correspondence, gives extracts from this "charming work," as he calls it, only twenty copies of which were at first put forth, but which, despite the infinite reserve with which it was distributed, could not escape the honor of a public edition. Before quoting from the book, the clever *habitué* of Mme. Necker's *salon* gives a flattering description of the young author, surrounded by all the illusions of her age, by all the pleasures of the town and the court, by all the homage which her father's fame and her own celebrity would naturally attract; "not to mention a desire to please so intense that it alone would probably atone for all deficiencies in the means which nature and destiny have lavished upon her." The Letters on Jean Jacques are a tribute of gratitude to her admired and favorite author, the one to whom Mme. de Staël was most intimately related. Others there are who are careful to conceal, and either fail to mention, or mention only to criticise, the literary parents who gave them birth. She, at the very outset of her career, acknowledges with noble candor the name of him from whom her inspiration is derived, from whose hands she has received the torch, from whom has flowed in upon her a vast wave of noble speech, like that for which Dante blessed Virgil of old. In literature, as in life, Mme. de Staël had her filial passion. The Letters on Jean Jacques are a hymn, but a hymn full of earnest thought, and varied by delicate observation—a hymn even then masculine and lofty in its tone, wherein we recognize Corinne after her descent from the capitol. All the future pro-

ductions of Mme. de Staël, of whatever character,—romantic, moral, political,—are foreshadowed in this rapid and harmonious eulogium on those of Rousseau, as the great musical work already complete in the mind of the composer is indicated in the overture. The success of the Letters, responding as they did to the sympathetic impulse of the time, was universal.

Grimm accords an equally high rank to the eulogium on M. de Guibert (1789), and gives an extract from it. He had seen it in manuscript only, but it was afterwards printed in the complete edition of Mme. de Staël's works. Her enthusiasm was as great for the object of this panegyric as subsequently for Jean Jacques, although in this case there seems to have been less reason for the sentiment; but while her confidence in the genius of her author has made her somewhat lavish of apotheoses, the work is sown with the seeds of new and bold political views. In the midst of all the pathetic exaggerations which she conceives to be moderation, she somehow contrives to make us pity and esteem this individual, who, greatly admired and envied in his day, and utterly forgotten since, will live in the future only through her. In the oration delivered on his reception into the Academy, M. de Guibert several times repeated the word *glory*, "thus," as she says, "involuntarily betraying his sublime passion." For ourselves, while acknowledging our obligations to this man of noble ambition and abortive genius for having been one of the first to conceive the idea of reform, and to suggest as its means the states-general and the citizen militia, we are yet more grateful to him for having surely divined and foreshadowed, under the lineaments of Zulma, the future greatness of Corinne.

By this time the social and literary success of Mme. de Staël was beginning to attract towards her the persiflage of those mocking spirits who subsequently, in 1800, entered into a new league against her. Champcenetz and Rivarol, who had published in 1788 the *Little Almanac of Great Men*, produced, two years later, a *Little Almanac of the Great Men of the Revolution*, and dedicated it to the *Baroness de Staël, Swedish Ambassadors to the Nation*. This epistle struck at once the key-note of all the succeeding criticisms. In fact, Rivarol and Champcenetz were masters of that vein of irony which Michaud, Fiévée, and others afterwards employed against Mme. de Staël. Henceforth, however, according to Grimm, the object of these satires occupied a height beyond the reach of shafts like these. The terrible events of the French revolution were destined to interrupt at an early period the literary life so brilliantly commenced, and to snatch it — fortunately, I believe, for human thought — from the swift vortex of worldliness in which it was involved.

Notwithstanding her absolute faith in M. Necker, and her unquestioning adoption and definite appropriation of the political views promulgated by her father in his *Considerations on the French Revolution*, it should be remarked that Mme. de Staël, young and ardent, ventured beyond him in the path that he had chosen. She did not limit herself to the contrivances of the English constitution, but went as far, on many points, as the most enthusiastic class of constitutional royalists, — such as MM. de Narbonne, de Montmorency, and M. de Lafayette himself. In short, if we were required to assign the actual political bias of Mme. de Staël at this period, powerfully as her opinions were

modified and influenced by her affections, it would be less accurate to represent her as belonging to the group of MM. Malouet, Mounier, and Necker, than to the constitutional royalists of '91, whose views were not a whit more ultra than her own. Moreover, there is a newspaper article of hers preserved in her works, which contains the sole expression in writing of her views at this time, and in which she pronounces on the dead Mirabeau a favorable judgment, which she afterwards saw fit to retract.¹

Mme. de Staël quitted Paris after the 2d of September, — not without danger. She spent the year of the Reign of Terror in the Pays de Vaud, with her father and a few other expatriated friends, among whom were M. de Montmorency and M. de Jaucourt. On the terraces of Coppet, beside the Lake of Geneva, the contrast between the glorious sunshine and the peace of Nature and the horrors everywhere unchained by the hand of man, was the constant subject of her thought. Aside from that eloquent and compassionate cry which she raised in behalf of the queen, and a poetical epistle on Misfortune, her talent preserved a religious silence. They heard afar, like the rapid, muf-

¹ There are some curious details about this period of Mme. de Staël's life, to be read in the Memorial of Gouverneur Morris, vol. i. pp. 256-322 of the French edition. Morris is a man of a satirical turn of mind, who makes entries in his journal each evening after he returns to his lodgings. With an observer of this sort enthusiasm finds little favor. Yet Mme. de Staël, even in her high-flown mood, is not always wrong. "January 25, 1791. At three I went to dine at Mme. de Staël's. She had not returned. The Abbé Sieyès was there discoursing. — Mme. de Staël says that the writings and the opinions of the Abbé will create a new era in politics, as those of Newton did in physics."

fled sound of oars upon the lake, the regular blows of the guillotine. Such were Mme. de Staël's anguish and oppression of heart during these fatal months, that, in the pauses of her active devotion to others, she could only desire death for herself, and long for the end of the world and the abandoned human race. "I should have reproached myself," she says, "even for thought, as something too independent of grief." The 9th of Thermidor¹ restored to her the power of thought in greater energy than ever after its temporary suspension, and she made prompt use of it by writing her *Reflections on External and Internal Peace*, the first part of which was addressed to Pitt, and the second to the French nation. In the latter, particularly, the mixture of profound commiseration and passionless justice, the appeal to all save the fanatics for oblivion and reconciliation, the fear of impending reaction, and of all *those extremes which naturally tend to produce one another*, — these sentiments, generous as they are opportune, indicate at once the grandeur of her soul and of her views. There is a kind of antique inspiration about this young female figure, which leaps upon smoking ruins in its eagerness to address the people. There is, moreover, great political sagacity, a grasp of the actual situation, in the counsels proffered in her impassioned tones. Speaking of the audacious triumphs of fanaticism, Mme. de Staël pronounces it the most formidable of human forces. She considers it an essential element both of conflict and success in revolutionary times; but she would at present confine it

¹ The 28th of July, 1794 — the date of Robespierre's death.
— TR.

within the circle which it has drawn around itself. Since the tendency of fanaticism was towards that republican form of government which it has at last obtained, she implores all sage spirits, all who have an honest love of liberty, whatever their point of departure, sincerely to unite on this new ground. She conjures bleeding hearts not to rebel against a fixed fact. "I cannot comprehend," she says, "how vengeance, though it be inseparable from hopeless regret, can attach to any given form of government, or ever create a desire for political concussions, which will affect the innocent equally with the guilty." There is, according to our author, no more auspicious moment in a season of revolution — none, that is to say, more directly dependent on intelligent effort and sacrifice — than that in which fanaticism itself comes earnestly to desire the establishment of a government, from which, if wiser minds will but acquiesce in it, no new misfortune need alienate the subject. Observe, she treats fanaticism precisely like a physical force, — as she would speak of gravity, for instance, — a striking proof of firmness of mind on the morrow of a great calamity. Persuaded that one can influence mixed opinions only, Mme. de Staël's principal aim in this article is to convert to her view the French of her own stamp, — the old constitutional royalists, — to induce them frankly to accept the established order of things, to the end that they may influence and modify, without attempting to clog it. "There is a vast difference," she says, "between having opposed an experiment as new as that of a republic in France, while as yet the chances were greatly against its success, and untold anguish was to be endured in its attainment, and desiring, with another sort of presump-

tion, the shedding of as much blood as has already flowed for the restoration of the only form of government considered practicable hitherto — a monarchy.” We can understand how such conclusions should have appeared too republican to those to whom they were addressed, and not enough so either to the mere conventionalists or to the republicans by conviction. In her other published writings up to the year 1803, we shall see Mme. de Staël attaching herself ever more and more closely to this form of government and the conditions essential to its maintenance. And in general, the philosophical principles tending to their development under the comprehensible and respectable constitution of the year III.¹ found in her a brilliant organ during this imperfectly appreciated season of her political and literary life. Not until a later period, and near the close of the empire, did the idea of the English constitution take possession of her mind.

In the volume of detached pieces published by Mme. de Staël in '95, we find, besides three novels belonging to her early youth, a charming essay on Fiction, and a little poem entitled *Épître au Malheur, ou Adèle et Edouard*, written in the immediate presence of the Terror. It is a remarkable fact that the solitary conception which occurred to her under these extraordinary circumstances, when the ordinary workings of her genius were suspended, and, as it were, annihilated, should have come in the form of a song or poem, and as a solace or diversion to her mind! So striking is the response which versification offers to the sorrows of the inner life, being in fact an instinctive form of complaint, — a kind of harmonious sigh which we naturally

¹ The year III. of the Republican Calendar is 1795. — TR.

desire, — a language which, in its sovereign sweetness, excels, when all others are silent, in giving voice and vent to our tears. But in this poem, as in other similar attempts of *Mme. de Staël*, the conception was better than the execution. Thus, after giving utterance to that prevailing feeling of hers which we have already indicated, she exclaims, —

“Souvent les yeux fixés sur ce beau paysage
Dont le lac avec pompe agrandit les tableaux,
Je contemplais ces monts, qui, formant son rivage,
Peignent leur cime auguste au milieu de ses eaux :
Quoi ! disais-je, ce calme où se plaît la nature
Ne peut-il pénétrer dans mon cœur agité ?
Et l'homme seul, en proie aux peines qu'il endure,
De l'ordre général serait-il excepté ? ”¹

This perception of a discord between the festive splendor of nature and human suffering and death, has inspired most modern poets with accents of bitterness and melancholy : Byron, in the magnificently ironical opening to the second canto of *Lara* ;² Shelley, towards the pathetic close of *Alastor* ;³ Lamartine, in the *Last Pilgrimage of Childe Harold* ;⁴ and M. Hugo, in

¹ Many a time, fixing my eyes upon the fair landscape gloriously reflected in the lake, I mused upon the mountains which form its shore, whose lofty peaks are imaged in the midst of its surface. And how, I cried, should the peace in which nature rejoices not find its way to my agitated heart ? Is man alone at the mercy of the pain which he endures ? Is he the sole exception to the general order ?

² “ But mighty nature bounds as from her birth.”

— *Lara*, Canto II.

³ “ And mighty earth

From sea and mountain, city and wilderness.” — *Alastor*.

⁴ “ Triumph, he cried, immortal Nature.”

— *Childe Harold's Last Song*. XLII.

one of the "Setting Suns" of his *Autumn Leaves*.¹ And does not Corinne herself, on Cape Miseno, catch the same sublime inspiration? "O, earth! steeped in tears and blood, thou bringest forth thy fruits and flowers unceasingly! Hast thou, then, no pity for man, and can his dust return into thy maternal bosom without causing it to bound?" How shall we account for the fact that when a poet in soul and expression like Mme. de Staël attempts to render in verse a sentiment which she so deeply feels, the effect should be so prosaic? Shall we say, with Mme. Necker de Saussure, that the mechanism of versification has been carried to such perfection in France, that the labor it necessitates deadens inspiration, unless one has become thoroughly accustomed to it? Or shall we follow a less indulgent critic, and conjecture that Mme. de Staël, who scarce ever, even in her prose, subjected herself to any rigorous law, was, perhaps, the least fitted, among all her contemporaries, to accept with resignation, and wear with grace, the yoke of rhyme? But, in the first place, we see eminent writers, severe, accomplished, and artistic to the last degree in their prose, whom their fixed literary habits have not in the least assisted to acquire a skilled and facile expression in verse. And, on the other hand, have we not the singular case of one of our greatest and most musical poets, who is also, and wilfully, one of the most careless of writers,—one of the least laborious in his verse as well as in his prose. It is better to recognize the fact, that independently of acquired habits and turns of mind, the poetic talent,

¹ "I shall soon depart in the very midst of the fête, and the vast and radiant earth will not miss me." — *Autumn Leaves*, XXXV.

like the musical, is a gift. Those whom the Muse has devoted to the fair realms of poesy mount thither as on wings. The essays of Mme. de Staël in this direction, like those of Benjamin Constant, were ordinary. Their thought, so free and eminent in prose, never assumes spontaneously the winged form of verse, which has no true consecration unless it is born and issues forth with the thought itself.

All the faculties of Mme. de Staël received from the violent storm through which she had just passed a thrilling impulse, and were stimulated, generally, to rapid flight. Her imagination, her sensibility, her accuracy of analysis and judgment, blended and coalesced into unity beneath the pen which soon produced memorable works. The Essay on Fiction, composed at this time, foreshadows all the poetry of Delphine. Grieved at the aspect of the real, the imagination of Mme. de Staël fondly betakes itself to better and fairer creations, or, at least, to sorrows the memory and tale of which move to softer tears. At the same time it is for the genuine romance of nature, for the analysis and dramatization of human passions, that Mme. de Staël is specially distinguished among fictitious writers. She will have no mythology, no allegory, no fantastic, supernatural, or fairy element, no obtrusive philosophical aim. *Clementine*, *Clarissa*, *Julie*, *Werther*, — these witnesses to the heart's omnipotence, as she calls them, — are quoted as cherished comforters. It is easy to foresee, by the emotion which seizes her when she pronounces their names, that a new sister will soon be born to them. A note to this essay mentions with praise the *Esprit des Religions*, an unfinished work of Benjamin Constant, which was not published until thirty years later. Mme.

de Staël had first made the acquaintance of this author in Switzerland, some time in September, '94. She had read a few chapters of the book in question, which, we may remark in passing, was, at the outset, and in its original conception, far more philosophic and accordant with eighteenth-century analysis than it afterwards became. Already we find, in the *Essay on Fiction*, that airy rapidity of movement, that wealth of vivid, apt, and suggestive words, those delicious touches of feeling which we get only from *Mme. de Staël*, and in which, properly speaking, the peculiarly poetic and dreamy melody of her style consists. When she speaks thus, there are tears even in the most brilliant notes of her voice. The more insignificant the thought, the more striking the accent, as, for instance, "In this life which we must pass, rather than feel;" "There are only beginnings on this earth;" and that thought, so applicable to her own works, "Yes, the book which merely affords a day's distraction to sorrow is a good book, and may be useful to the best of men."

But this kind of inspired sentimentalism, this mysterious reflection thrown from the depths of the heart, irradiates throughout the book *On the Influence of the Passions*, and imparts to it an indefinable charm, which, for certain pensive natures, at certain periods of life, is unsurpassed by the influence of anything else that can be read, even by the sadness of *Ossian* or *Oberman*. The earlier pages of the book are, moreover, remarkable from a political point of view. In fact, the author, who has treated at length only of the influence of the passions on individual happiness, designed to investigate, in a second part, the influence of these same motives on the happiness of society, and the main ques-

tions preliminary to this vast inquiry, are raised and touched upon in an eloquent introduction. Struggling at the outset, with the haunting memory of a monstrous past, Mme. de Staël exclaims that she will not recur to it even in thought. "At this frightful image, all the tumult of the soul returns. We shiver — we burn — we would resist — we long to die." Coming generations may be able to study these two last years calmly, but she will not even reason upon them; and she turns to the future. She separates generous ideas from the unfortunate advocates they have obtained, and disengages certain principles from the crimes by which they have been defiled. She is hopeful still. The judgment she passes upon the British constitution is formal. She believes that we may now dispense, in France, with the fictions consecrated by this aristocratic institution of our neighbors. She is for no system of checks and balances, but would have all the elements of power move in the same direction, although with different degrees of velocity. "In all the sciences," she says, "progress is from the more complex to the more simple. In mechanics, we had the wheel-work of Marly previous to the use of pumps. An illustration is no proof, but it may be," she adds, "that when the idea of liberty first recurred to the world in England, a hundred years ago, the complex organization of the English constitution was the highest point of perfection then attainable; but in France, now that the revolution is over, simpler bases may be laid for a superstructure, equal, in some respects, and superior in others." "France," she thinks, "ought to persist in this mighty experiment, whose attendant disasters are past, whose promise is yet to be realized." "Let us,"

she says to Europe, "let us in France struggle, conquer, suffer, die amid our fondly-cherished desires, and then be born again, it may be, to the astonishment and admiration of the world. Are you not glad that a nation should have placed itself in the vanguard of the human race, to face all prejudices, to test all principles?" Marie Joseph Chénier ought to have remembered all the passages inspired by the free genius of these years of hope, instead of fastening, as he has done, in his *Tableau de la Littérature* on one doubtful word let fall by Condorcet. Towards the end of her introduction, Mme. de Staël comes back to the influence of individual passions, to the theory of moral happiness, — that is, of the least unhappiness, — and closes with pathetic eloquence. The acknowledged necessity for toleration and self-sacrifice, the kindly solicitude which takes note of the sorrows of each and all, and endeavors to relieve them when this is possible, the — how shall I express it? — maternal compassion of genius for suffering humanity — the book glows and overflows with sentiments like these, expressed in words whose tone and accent are indescribable. Nowhere so plainly as in these noble pages has Mme. de Staël revealed the genial and cordial spirit which was to animate her life. In her writing, in her conversation, in her whole personality, there was a healing, soothing, emotional quality, which communicated itself to her hearers, and survives for her readers. Far different from the haughty style of genius, whether man or woman, — the Laras and the Lelias, — (I speak of Lelia only, and not of you, O Geneviève and Lavinia,¹); there was, in

¹ I was early interested to discover the delicate and impassioned side of George Sand's nature, and would gladly have

her, no trace of arrogance or irony towards poor human nature. Notwithstanding her fancy for those peerless types of character which present salient points in a romance, she believed in the equality of the human family. Mme. Necker de Saussure tells us that even in respect of the intellectual faculties, her opinion was that the fundamental difference, the native distinction wherein consists the superiority of eminent geniuses over common men, is exceedingly small. But her natural impulse carries for no theory. Her impressive voice makes direct appeal to our better nature, over which it exerts a warming and vivifying power. The effect of her words is always conciliatory, stimulating to the social sentiment and the love of our kind. In this book on the Influence of the Passions, she has expressed many of the same ideas as M. de Maistre, in his *Considérations sur la Révolution Française*, which was written and published at precisely the same date. But what a difference of tone! The contemptuous patrician, stern, orthodox, and paradoxical, delights to reveal to contemporary victims the descendants who will dance upon their graves. His mighty brain judges the disasters of the time coldly and with an offensive rigidity. Mme. de Staël, despite certain misty illusions, often penetrates as deeply into the heart of events as M. de Maistre; but she does it as one who sympathizes and has a share in them. I

seen it triumph over the vehement and declamatory element. The latter, however, has gained an ever-increasing ascendancy. I note the fact without any invidious comment, for, lamentably as it has been employed, what marvellous and perpetual proofs of talent this writer gives us, even in her wildest and most fantastic romances.

shall not analyze the book, but I would advise the reader to re-peruse the chapter on Love; for it contains the private history of the throbbing and only half-veiled heart of this woman of thirty, and gives us all the knowledge of her we could desire. As we read we are surrounded by the manifold echoes of thoughts which we can never forget. There is one word in particular which has always remained with me, and which I often repeat. "The soul's life is more active elsewhere than upon the throne of the Cæsars." If I shall seem to linger over these earlier writings of Mme. de Staël, over the book on the Passions and the later one on Literature, it is because in them she first appeared to me in person; because I read them, especially the *Influence*, not in accordance with her wish, at twenty-five, but earlier, — at that age when we are thoroughly simple and ascetic, both in politics and in love, and full of solemn resolutions; when, believing ourselves the most unhappy of mortals, we yet have ardent dreams of the happiness and progress of the world; at that age, more and more regretted as we advance in life, when the very excess of confused hope and stormy passion disguises itself beneath a stoicism, supposed to be eternal, and when it is easy for us to renounce life because we are just entering upon its experience. Even now, these two works of Mme. de Staël — *The Influence of the Passions* and the book on Literature — appear to me among the most illustrious and characteristic products of an epoch which had its own peculiar glory, — the period of the Directory, or more strictly speaking, of the Constitution of the year III.¹ They could

¹ 1795.

neither have been composed at an earlier period, nor later under the Empire. They represent to me, beneath a heaven of youth, the lofty, pure, enthusiastic philosophy and poetry of the republican period, — the literary pendant to one of Moreau's Rhine marches, or some early combat in Italy. M. de Chateaubriand, and the whole reactionary movement of 1800, were not as yet. Mme. de Staël was the sole propagandist of sentimental and poetic speculation; but through her it penetrated to the very heart of philosophy and of the age.

The book on the Influence of the Passions met with a favorable reception. The *Mercure*, not as yet thoroughly restored to the place it held in 1800, published extracts from the work, accompanied by friendly criticism. Mme. de Staël had returned to Paris in '95, and from that time until her exile she made long and frequent sojourns there. We need not concern ourselves with the details of her political conduct, the main course of which she has herself traced in her Considerations on the Revolution; and it would be vain to attempt to supply the deficiencies of her own narrative by particulars drawn from any equivocal source. But in a very remarkable and clever fragment on Benjamin Constant, published in the *Revue des Deux Mondes*,¹ there is given of Mme. de Staël, and her relations at that period, an idea, which, though incorrect, is so conformable to a wide-spread prejudice, that we feel bound to correct it. The *salon* of Mme. de Staël, at Paris, is represented as the centre of a coterie of malcontents, — of men disgusted with the old and new

¹ 1833, vol. i. p. 135. The article is by Loève Veimars.

régime alike, — who could not bring their minds to the idea of a pure republic, and were averse to the honest experiment destined to be so vainly tried. Benjamin Constant, on the other hand, appears among them in all the candor of a novice, inclining towards the views of the moderate republicans, towards those same *patriotes* who are described to him in Mme. de Staël's *salon* in such sanguinary colors. Judicious and correct in all that he says of the political sentiments of Benjamin Constant, this ingenious writer is totally unfair to Mme. de Staël. For, whatever may have been the inevitable confusion of her drawing-room, — as of all the drawing-rooms of that motley period, — her manifest wishes were entirely in harmony with the honorable and reasonable experiment of the year III. Without dwelling on what she herself says on this head in her *Considerations*, which might be suspected of having been arranged for effect, we desire no better proof than that contained in her writings from 1795 to 1800, and the evident result of her actions. Generally speaking, there are two classes of persons who are never to be consulted or believed when there is a question of the relations sustained and the part played by Mme. de Staël during this period; — on the one hand, the royalists, who have remained faithful to their old grudges, and who accuse her of monstrous alliances, almost of Jacobinism, and, for ought I know, of defending the 18th of Fructidor;¹ and, on the other, a class of men whose testimony on this point is equally untrustwor-

¹ September 4, 1797 — the day on which government was usurped by the Directory, and a military despotism established in France.

thy, — the more or less ardent conventionists, who, having themselves favored, first the 18th of Fructidor, and then the 18th of Brumaire,¹ ended by taking service under the Empire. These individuals never encountered this indomitable woman, save on the opposite side. The truest political friends of Mme. de Staël at this time are to be found in that illustrious and moderate group where figure Lanjuinais, Boissy-d'Anglas, Cabanis, Garat, Daunou, Tracy, and Chénier. These men she esteemed and emulated, and with some of them her relations were even intimate. After the 18th of Brumaire her interest in them deepened, and the opposition of Benjamin Constant to the Tribunate constituted a last link between these two. We shall see that when the book on Literature appeared, in 1800, and *Delphine*, in 1803, her only zealous defenders against the unbridled virulence of the opposing party were to be found in this class of her political friends. Let us hasten to add, that we have no desire to represent Mme. de Staël at any moment as narrower in her range of thought, more cautious in the connections she formed, in short, more *exclusive* than she really was.² She was always the very opposite of

¹ November 9, 1799 — the day on which government passed from the hands of the Directory into those of the three consuls, Bonaparte, Siéyes, and Roger Ducos. — TR.

² An English poet and moralist, universally severe and even unjust towards France, William Cowper, is not, however, so far wrong when he defines the French, on the occasion of the American war, as “that restless, meddling nation, which mixes itself up in every affair, or, at least, in most.” Mme. de Stael could not help having the national characteristics intensified. And so it often happened that she amazed Englishmen and Dutchmen by her forwardness and her gushing enthusiasm, when distin-

exclusive. Yet when her young and masculine reason declared for the republican cause, she had a thousand points of sympathy of mind and taste with views and opinions of a totally different nature, — more frivolous or more refined as may be, but at all events profoundly dissimilar. This power of uniting opposites is her glory, and, to some extent, her foible. If Garat, Cabanis, Chénier, Ginguené, and Daunou met Benjamin Constant at her dinner table once a week, — or, rather, once a *décade*, for people still said so, — the nine other days were devoted to other friends and different social customs — to shades of feeling that never encroached on the more decided colors. In all this, I verily believe, she preserved a certain order, perhaps a certain hierarchy. Never was M. de Montmorency, or any other man of his stamp, to be met at her house on the day when the writers for the *Décade Philosophique* dined there in company. Ginguené never failed each time to remark the fact, and was none too well pleased with these exact separations, which to his mind savored a little of aristocracy. His companions, however, soon restored him to a more charitable frame of mind, which the high-minded amiability and serious charm of Mme. de Staël's manner were all-sufficient to maintain.

Her *Littérature considéré dans ses rapport avec les Institutions Sociales* appeared in 1800, almost a year earlier than that glorious rival production already

guished men of those reserved and prudent races encountered her for the first time in society. (Vide page 88 of a book entitled *Notice et Souvenirs Biographiques du Comte Van der Duyn*, collected and published by Baron de Grovestins, 1852.)

foreshadowed under the title of *Beautés morales et poétiques de la Religion Chrétienne*. Although the work on Literature has not had the direct and lasting influence in subsequent times which might have been expected, it was, at the date of its appearance, an event in the world of mind, and the occasion of violent controversy. We shall endeavor to reproduce the scene and the principal events of this contest, and to summon some of the chief actors from their almost nameless graves, in those vast cemeteries called Journals.

We have often had occasion to remark the striking discord which prevails between the advanced political ideas of certain men and the obstinate conservation of their literary principles. Liberals and republicans have ever shown themselves religiously classical in their literary theories, while the political innovations, the brilliant and successful audacity, have almost invariably come from the other side. The work on Literature was intended to prevent this lamentable incongruity, and the spirit by which it was inspired would certainly have borne fruit in the minds of others, if the free political institutions essential to its natural development had not been rudely overthrown, together with the ideas on moral and literary matters which they tended to induce. In a word, the rising generation, if it had had time to grow up under an honest directory, or a moderate consulate, might have developed from within this fresh inspiration, poetical, emotional, and yet accordant with the results of philosophy and the revelations of modern light; whereas, in fact, the only literary movement of the day was one in favor of a catholic, monarchical, and chivalric reaction. Thus the noble energies of modern thought were divided, and the divorce has not yet ceased.

The idea constantly kept in view by Mme. de Staël, in this composition, is one peculiar to the genius of modern times, wherever the latter is progressive, hopeful, successful, — that, namely, of the indefinite perfectibility of the human species. This idea, over which Bacon was already brooding when he said, “*Antiquitas sæculi juvenus mundi*,”¹ whose existence in the heart of the nineteenth century has been clearly proved by M. Leroux, in the *Revue Encyclopédique* for March, 1833, from more than one passage of Fontenelle and Perrault, and which the eighteenth century promulgated in every conceivable shape, up to the days of Turgot, who made it the subject of Latin discourses at the Sorbonne, and Condorcet, who was in a furor over it on the eve of his suicide, — this idea strongly influences and animates Mme. de Staël. “I cannot think,” she says, “that so mighty a creation as man’s moral nature has ever been abandoned. In the dark, as well as in the illumined ages, the progress of the human mind has been slow but continuous;” and farther on, “As we study history, I think the conviction grows upon us that all the principal events are tending to the same end — universal civilization.” “Every faculty of my mind assents to this philosophical creed, one of whose chief advantages is that of inspiring great elevation of feeling.” Those of the fine arts which are specially dependent on the imagination, Mme. de Staël does not bring under this law of perfectibility, but she believes in progress in the sciences, philosophy, history even, and also, to some, extent, in poetry, which, being more immediately connected with thought than either of the other arts, admits, among the moderns,

¹ The old age of time is the youth of the world.

of a tone of deeper reverie and sadness, and a more exhaustive analysis of the passions, than was known to the ancient world. Hence her declared predilection for Ossian, for Werther, for the Heloïse of Pope, for the Julie of Rousseau, and for Aménaida in Tancréd. The numerous passing references to Greek literature, though very questionable through the poverty of their details, all converge towards one general estimate, which remains just in spite of errors and imperfections. The positive, imposing, philosophically eloquent character of the Latin literature is clearly indicated. We feel that in order to write thus, she must early have applied to Sallust and Cicero, and that she has detected in them actual or possible conformities with her own era and the heroic genius of France. The influence of Christianity on society at the time of the fusion of barbarous invaders with degenerate Romans, is by no means overlooked, although her appreciation and homage are expressed in philosophical terms. There is one new and fruitful idea frequently advanced of late, and fostered by Saint-Simonism and other influences, which properly belongs to Mme. de Staël, namely, that the French Revolution was a veritable barbarian eruption in the interior of society, and that all we now need is to civilize and soften its slightly brutal results under the law of liberty and equality. It is easy at the present day to carry out the thought of Mme. de Staël. The inroad of '89 was merely an inroad of the *bourgeoisie*. The dregs of the people, who effected a breach in '93, have been repeatedly repulsed, but the *bourgeoisie* has vigorously intrenched itself. At present¹ there is a pause in the movement of inva-

¹ 1835.

sion, like that which occurred, for example, under the Emperor Probus. But new incursions threaten us, and it remains to be seen whether they can be controlled and allayed in an amicable manner, or whether there is no escape from violent courses. In any case, the resultant confusion must necessarily issue in equilibrium and organization. Then it was Christianity which acted on the mixed mass of barbarians and Romans. Where is the new Christianity which will render the same moral service to-day? "Well for us," exclaims Mme. de Staël, "if there were to be found among us, as at the time of the Northern invasions, a school of philosophy, — a righteous enthusiasm, — a strong and just code of legislation, — which should constitute, as did the Christian religion, a common ground on which conquerors and conquered might unite!" Subsequently, at a riper age, when, as we shall see, her faith in new discoveries and human omnipotence had grown weaker, Mme. de Staël would not have placed the means of the moral regeneration which she invoked outside the ancient and unique Christianity. But what may be the precise nature of the hold which Christianity is to have on the society of the future is yet uncertain; and, for the more religious class of thoughtful minds, the difficulty of this great problem does not diminish.

On the appearance of the work on Literature the *Décade Philosophique* published three articles, or abstracts, without signature or even initials. They contain an exceedingly nice and minute analysis of the treatise, interspersed with critical remarks and discussions, in which praise and blame are very fairly meted out. In them occurs the observation that Ossian is but

an imperfect type of the poetry of the North, and that the honor of this representation belongs of right to Shakespeare. Apropos of the Homeric poems, we meet this sentence, which betrays the hand of a proficient in divers literary systems: "Mme. de Staël assumes, without hesitation or discussion, that these poems are the work of one man, and anterior to all other Greek poems. These facts have been disputed, and one of the considerations which go to prove that the question is still open, is the impossibility of reconciling them with some of the best-established facts in the history of human knowledge." The critic objects to the imperfect plan and method of the book. "A fault of a different nature," he adds, "is excessive subtilty in some of its combinations of ideas. The causes therein assigned for certain general facts, perfectly obvious and well-attested, are often too curious and remote to be absolutely true, — too special to correspond with known results." But the vigor and originality of the work are highly praised; "and these two qualifications please us all the more in that we feel they are the product of a deep and delicate sensibility, prone to discover that aspect of things which is most in harmony with the loftiest views of the intellect, and the noblest sentiments of the heart."¹

¹ We have felt bound to attempt to discover the anonymous author of these abstracts. It is not probable that they are by Ginguéné, who afterwards noticed *Delphine* in the *Décade*, and who has a very different style. It seemed to us, at first, that if Benjamin Constant had desired to criticise the treatise on Literature at that time, he would have done it very much after this fashion. But the only person connected with the *Décade*, still living and able to enlighten us on this item of authorship, — the highly re-

La Clef du Cabinet des Souverains, — a rather motley journal, under the direction of Panckoucke, — contained some observations on Mme. de Staël's book, from the pen of a physician and man of letters named Roussel, the author of a work on Woman, and also an estimate of Daunou's, or at least a friendly and minute analysis, with the judgments rather insinuated than expressed, after the cautious fashion of this learned writer, whose authority carried so much weight, and all whose productions have an air of sober perfection. The *Journal des Débats* of the 11th of Messidor,¹ year VIII., accepted, with considerable pruning, a favorable notice by M. Hochet; but three days later, recovering from its first surprise, it published, under the title of Varieties, an anonymous article, in which Mme. de Staël is not mentioned by name, but where the system of perfectibility, and the disastrous consequences it is supposed to entail, are attacked with animation and even with violence. "The genius which now presides over the destinies of France," it says, "is a wise genius. The experience of ages and that of the Revolution are before its eyes. It strays into no vain theories, and does not aspire to the glory of a system. It understands that men have always been the same, that nothing can change their nature, and that the present is to

spectable M. Amaury Duval, — assured us that Benjamin Constant was not the author of these pieces, and inclined to the belief that they were sent to the journal by one M. Marigniez, a physician from Montpellier, one of the literati of Paris, and author of a tragedy called Zorai, noticed by Grimm, — whose posthumous reputation is not equal to his actual merit. I have since become convinced that the articles were by M. Fauriel.

¹ 29th June, 1800.

be regulated by lessons drawn from the past. It has no disposition to plunge into new misfortunes by fresh efforts in the pursuit of a chimerical perfection, with which people attempt to contrast the reality, and thereby greatly favor the projects of the factions," &c., &c. But the most celebrated and important of the articles on Mme. de Staël were Fontanes's two abstracts in the *Mercury*.

The religious, monarchical, and literary reaction of 1800, was, in fact, everywhere taking shape, and, as it were, deploying along the whole line. Bonaparte favored the movement, as one by which he was to profit, and was careful never to oppose its supporters, who flattered him, to a man. The *Journal des Débats* solemnly reinstated literary criticism, and declared in an article by Geoffroy (30th Prairial, year VIII.),¹ that "the extinction of parties, the establishment of public tranquillity on a firm basis, and a strong, wise, and moderate government, had at length given the French people leisure to recover itself, and collect its scattered ideas." Dussault, Feletz, Delalot, Fiévée, Saint-Victor, and the Abbé of Boulogne, wrote frequently for this journal. The *Mercury* had been reëstablished, or, at least, regenerated, and in the first number subsequent to its renovation appeared Fontanes's first article against Mme. de Staël. Associated with Fontanes as contributors were La Harpe, the Abbé de Vauxcelles, Gueneau de Mussy, M. de Bonald, M. de Chateaubriand, and several of the writers for the *Débats*. Each number of the *Mercury* received in its auxiliary daily a laudatory announcement, accompanied by long extracts. The

¹ June 18, 1800.

Lyceum in the Rue de Valois had been reopened, and there La Harpe inveighed against the eighteenth century and the Revolution, making brilliant and perfectly sincere recantations, which were reproduced in the morrow's *Débats* and the week's *Mercure*, sometimes with comments, sometimes without. "The chaos consequent upon ten years of trouble and distraction is clearing day by day," said some one in the *Débats*; and, to remedy the confusion in matters of taste, which was more prolonged and unmanageable than elsewhere, it was proposed to reëstablish the old French Academy. M. Michaud, on his return from the exile to which he had been condemned by the 18th of Fructidor, published his letters to Delille on Pity, being engaged, meanwhile, in the preparation of his poem, *An Exile's Spring*, some specimens of which were given to the world in advance. On the occasion of the republication in London of his poem of *The Gardens*, the French Virgil had been entreated to cut short his now voluntary expatriation, and hasten his return to a France worthy of himself; and the example of Voltaire had been adduced, who, being in his day a refugee in London, had refused to prolong a painful absence until it became agreeable. The appearance of *The Genius of Christianity*, a year later, was to add new splendor to a restoration already so brilliant, and to diffuse around it the only halo which still, at this distant day, lights up what would otherwise have been forgotten.

It was natural, however, that Mme. de Staël, the child of the Revolution, and inspired by its philosophy, who had abused the reign of Louis XIV., and dreamed of the establishment of an ideal republic, should be regarded by all the men in this camp as an

alien and an enemy. Fontanes opened the attack upon her in a close and captious criticism. He extols that earlier work of Mme. de Staël's which had been consecrated to the genius of Rousseau. "Since then her attempts do not seem to have secured an equal number of suffrages." He first attacks the doctrine of perfectibility. He represents Mme. de Staël as raving about the steady and uninterrupted growth of the human mind in the same breath in which she bewails the heart's anguish and the corruptions of the time, being in this particular like the philosophers mentioned by Voltaire, —

"Qui criaient, 'Tout est bien,' d'une voix lamentable."¹

He makes great capital out of this contradiction, which, however, is only apparent. We should expect the partisans of perfectibility to be the first to condemn the present, or, at least, to attack and malign it. Those who are sceptical of perfection are not so irascible towards existing circumstances, but accept them more cheerfully, and endeavor to accommodate themselves to them in detail. Following up this piquant contradiction, Fontanes maintains that the moment the dream of human perfectibility seizes on the human mind, empires are threatened with terrible scourges. "The erudite Varron enumerated two hundred and eighty-eight different theories of the sovereign good which had been advanced between the days of Marius and Sylla and his own. It is a kind of indemnification which the mind of man reserves for itself." But, according to Fontanes, who quotes under this head a remark of Condorcet's,

¹ Who cried, "All is well!" in tones of lament.

the original author of this *consoling* notion of perfectibility was Voltaire. The critic then commences a clever simplification of the question, and, by degrees, reduces it to the dimensions of that verse in the *Mondain*,—

“O, le bon temps que le siècle de fer!”¹

This, in his opinion, is a most complete and elegant *résumé* of all the twaddle that has been uttered on this subject. The grave, masculine mind of Mme. de Staël could barely tolerate this light, jeering, Marotic reference of the whole matter to a verse of the *Mondain*. Boiling over with impatience, she exclaimed in private, “O, if I were only a man, though ever so insignificant, I would make short work with these anti-philosophers!” The first article in the *Mercur*e closed with a memorable postscript: “As this article was going to press, chance threw in our way a yet unpublished work, with the title of Moral and Poetic Beauties of the Christian Religion. We give a few fragments, in which the author has treated, after an original fashion, the question discussed by Mme. de Staël.” Thus promptly did the rivalry between Mme. de Staël and M. de Chateaubriand declare itself, although in the beginning it was their friends who set them in opposition one to another. Fontanes, the ally and advocate of Chateaubriand, attacked the author of *La Littérature* in the *Décade*. Ginguené, the future eulogist of *Delphine*, made war on the Genius of Christianity, and did not hesitate to declare that this work, so extravagantly praised in advance, had gone into eclipse as soon as it appeared. But we shall presently consider at length

¹ O, what a fine time is the iron age!

the actual relations of these two illustrious contemporaries.

In his second article, Fontanes resents, on behalf of the Greeks, "the invasion of the sombre and melancholy style—a style peculiar to the spirit of Christianity, and yet singularly suited to the purposes of modern philosophy." It seems that in her first edition, Mme. de Staël had made this remark, which was afterwards modified: "The philosophy of Anacreon is several centuries behind his style." "Ah!" cries Fontanes, "what woman capable of inspiring songs ever wrote thus of the poet of love and pleasure?" As to the dreamy sadness characteristic of impressions received in solitude,—a species of inspiration which Mme. de Staël denies to the Greeks,—he asks where it was ever better illustrated than in the person of Philoctetes. Had he, then, so soon forgotten his recent private perusal of René?¹ However, these articles abound in nice and accurate details. When the author supports the claims of Homer against those of Ossian, his triumph is easy; and in treating the question at issue between north and south, it occurs to him very opportunely that the saddest of all poems was written three thousand years ago by an Arabian named Job. He defers, he says, a more exhaustive examination of the

¹ The most respectable classic ancestor of the dreamy and melancholy recluse is assuredly Bellerophon. Homer is the first to notice it. Ausonius, the last of the ancients, says, —

. "Ceu dicitur olim
Mentis inops cœtus hominum et vestigia vitans
Avia perlustrasse vagus loca Bellerophontes."

Bellerophon has a better right than Philoctetes to be considered the René and Oberman of Greek fable.

subject to a time when the most innocent questions will no longer be treated as affairs of state; but we should say it was rather for Mme. de Staël to complain that her philosophical doctrines were treated as factious opinions. The articles of Fontanes made a great stir, and excited passions on both sides. Mme. Joseph Bonaparte treated their author to a scene at Morfontaine, the next time she saw him. Bonaparte himself slyly noted this able writer as a respectable and moderate organ won to his future enterprises.

Need we mention, after the critiques of Fontanes, two pieces by Geoffroy, which present precisely the same ideas, but with less of malicious urbanity and courtly grace?

The second edition of the work on Literature appeared six months after the first; and in it Mme. de Staël attempts to refute Fontanes, and to clear the question of those details of petty cavil in which it had become involved. She takes no personal vengeance on her critic, save by quoting with praise a poem of his, entitled *Le Jour des Morts dans une Compagne*; but she pitilessly assails that false *fine taste* which demands that a precise and commonplace style should be employed to clothe ideas more commonplace still. "Such a style," she says, "exposes one to very little criticism. The phrases that we have known so long are like the old frequenters of a house. We let them pass without question. But there is not an eloquent writer or thinker alive who does not make use of expressions which astonish those who meet them for the first time, provided they are not carried away by his fervor of spirit and grandeur of ideas." It is evident that Mme. de Staël would have been more difficult to

suit than Boileau, who wrote to Brossette, "Bayle is a great genius. He is a man of the best brand. His style is extremely clear and sparkling. We hear every word he says." She thought, and justly, that there was a better brand, a style-mark superior even to this. Her second edition gave occasion for an article in the *Débats*, which says in conclusion, as if in reply to the passage just quoted from the new preface, "All our most eminent literati concede that the form of our language has been fixed and determined by the great writers of the two last centuries. In an idiom, the part which appertains to the taste and imagination must be distinguished from that which has no connection with these faculties. At present there is nothing to prevent our introducing new words, when these have become absolutely necessary; but we cannot invent new figures, under pain of distorting our language and proving unfaithful to its spirit." The *Décade* replied at once to this extraordinary assertion in an article which I fancy to have been Ginguené's. The philosophical critic appears transformed into a thorough-going revolutionist in literature, in his eagerness to confute this critic of the *Débats*, "who will not have his mind improved." "If there had been journalists in the days of Corneille, and they had expressed themselves thus, and Corneille and his successors had been fools enough to heed them, our literature would never have risen above the level of Malherbe, de Regnier, de Voiture, and de Brébeuf. This is the man who proposes to continue Fréron's Literary Year—a task worthy of him." We see that Ginguené ascribed—perhaps erroneously—the article in the *Débats* to Geoffroy. He is naturally induced to quote a remark-

able note of Lemer cier's on one of Homer's poems which had recently appeared. "Pedants," says Lemer cier, who was then an innovator, "animadvert on words, but have no perception of things. They take infinite pains to detect what they call negligences of style. Subligny found four hundred mistakes in the *Andromache* of Racine. They immortalized some of the verses where they occurred. There are criticisms extant which accuse Boileau of not writing French! Genius makes its own language. Who does not know that Virgil and Horace were confronted with Ennius and Lucretius? The Latin of the two former was unknown on the eve of their appearance. The usual comment, that this remark opens the door to bad taste, would be in point if that door were ever closed." Do not these quotations suggest in what way the men of the political and republican movement might also have become the organs of a literary movement, if the spontaneous development which was taking place among them had not been crushed out, along with all their hopes, by the shocks of despotism which succeeded?

These quarrels of the day are the quarrels of all time. In the *Bibliothèque Universelle et Historique* of Le Clerc (1677) we find appended to certain remarks by Vaugelas the clever and judicious protest of an anonymous writer against the rigorous rules imposed upon the sentence, and those restrictions on metaphor which had acquired the force of law. Liberals in literature will read this fragment with an agreeable surprise—glad to recognize one of the ideas of '89 in Fénelon.

I must confess that it gives me pleasure just at this time to be able to reply in words that are not my own

to what strikes me as somewhat crabbed and narrow in the literary theories accepted by some of our bold politicians, and revived of late by certain young but already obstinate critics. The partisans of an exclusive taste and an immutable language sustain precisely the part of *Tories* in literature. They are for a cause which is growing weaker day by day. They make a point of stopping and clinging. Very well. After every season of advancement, during which some fresh and mighty genius has appeared, they propose to close their doors; they make haste to erect a barrier which will soon be forced by new talent. They or their fathers refused Mme. de Staël and M. de Chateaubriand thirty years ago, and Lamartine fifteen years later. To-day they seize and appropriate them, and use them as weapons against their successors. The system may have its use and value. Every talent needs to be tested in its turn, and to undergo its quarantine; but it must be conceded that for this post of officer of literary quarantine, narrower gifts of thought and imagination are requisite than for the opposite part.¹

¹ This plea in bar adduced against newly-arrived geniuses is tolerably old — dating back, as M. Lemercier observes, to the palmy days of Louis XIV. The limits of its authority have been constantly narrowing, yet it has become no whit less autocratic in its negative than of old. Corneille, on his *début*, seemed irregular to D'Aubignac and the Academy. Racine, at the outset of his career, was pronounced insipid and effeminate by the admirers of Corneille. La Bruyère is remarked by D'Olivet as tainted with neologism, and opening the door to affectation in matters of taste. Vigneul-Marville, who contrasts him with Saint Evremonde and Nicole, says of him, "His style, according to M. Ménage, is original, but none the better for that. It is hard to introduce a new style into a language with success, prin-

But the most remarkable article provoked by the work on Literature was a long letter of M. de Chateaubriand's, inserted in the *Mercur* of Nivôse, year IX.¹ This letter, addressed to Citizen Fontanes, is signed by "the author of the *Genius of Christianity*," which book, although announced, had not yet appeared. The young author, with the most finished courtesy, and amid frequent compliments to the imaginative power of her with whom he contends, here takes ground against the system and principles which she professed: "Mme. de Staël ascribes to philosophy what I attribute to religion. You know very well that my especial foible is to see Jesus Christ everywhere as Mme. de Staël sees perfectibility. I regret that she should have left us her system of the passions undeveloped on the side of religion. I cannot think that we have any need to employ perfectibility as the measure of our weakness." And elsewhere: "At times Mme. de Staël appears Christian; but the next instant the philosopher regains ascendancy. Anon, inspired by native sensibility, she lets loose her soul; but suddenly ratiocination revives, and gives the lie to the heart's transports. This book, then, contains a singular mixture of truth and error." The praise awarded her talent is sometimes seasoned with a ceremonious and slightly malicious gallantry. "When she comes to speak of love, Mme. de Staël expounds Phædra. Her observations are acute, and especially because languages mount upward to perfection, as ours has done." Voltaire had no reputation at first, save that of a witty libertine. Jean Baptiste pronounced his works disjointed fragments, in which good sense is made of no account. To the admirers of Jean Baptiste and Crébillon, *Le Temple du Goût* passed for a masterpiece of extravagance and wicked wit.

¹ December, 1801.

we see by reference to the scholiast that she has made herself perfectly acquainted with her text." The letter closes with an eloquent double apostrophe: "Had I the honor of her acquaintance, this is what I would make bold to say: 'You are, beyond doubt, a remarkable woman. Your intellect is vigorous, the flights of your imagination often full of charm, as in what you say of Herminia disguised as a warrior; your form of expression is not seldom splendid and sublime. But, notwithstanding all these advantages, your work is not what it should have been. The style is monotonous; it lacks movement; and is too often encumbered by metaphysical expressions. Your sophistry repels, your erudition does not satisfy, your heart is too often sacrificed to your head. Your talent is but half developed. Philosophy has stifled it.' This is what I would say to Mme. de Staël in connection with her fame. I would also add, 'You seem to be unhappy. You complain in your work that you lack hearts to comprehend you. It is because there are some souls that seek in vain in the natural world for souls with which they can fitly unite. But how can philosophy fill the void in your life? Will the desert satisfy the desert?'" &c.

Mme. de Staël, accessible and sensitive to every form of admiration, desired to know the author of the letter in the *Mercure*, and so this early polemical exploit became the origin of a connection between two children of genius whose names and fames we are accustomed to unite. Yet this connection was not what one would naturally have expected. The provinces of the two were distinct and limited. Their respective friends, less cautious than themselves, frequently clashed. Ridiculing *Delphine*, in the same sharp fashion in which

Chénier presently retorted upon *Atala*, M. Michaud wrote, "You designed to produce a counterpart to the Genius of Christianity, and you published the Moral and Poetical Beauties of Philosophy. You have completely crushed poor Chateaubriand. I only hope that he will consider himself dead." A worshipper of Greek genius and of the Homeric and Sophoclean ideal,—chanting the praises of Cymodocée and Eudore and of the dazzling ceremonies of Catholicism, M. de Chateaubriand, who was already a finished artist, was not easily won to admiration of the ever misty coloring of Mme. de Staël's heroes, to the vagueness of some of her outlines, to the predominance given to thought and theory over form, and to her throng of ideas, brilliant but often premature, and intersecting one another as thoughts do in conversation. He admired Mme. de Staël less at that period than she him. On the other hand, whether accidentally and through involuntary forgetfulness, or from the difficulty of expressing herself suitably on this subject, it so happens that there is very little said of him in any of her numerous works. Evenings at Coppet, when Paul and Virginia and the episode of Velléda were read and compared, Mme. de Staël was enthusiastic in her preference of the passionate and potent beauty of the story of the priestess over the sweetness (too bucolic for her taste) of the other masterpiece. The famous article suppressed by the *Mercure* in 1807, also extorted from her cries of admiration,¹ but in her actual writings we find hardly any testimony on this

¹ The *Souvenirs* of M. Meneval (vol. i. p. 29) reveal her to us in the light of a patroness and eager reader of *Atala* and *René*, in the clique of Joseph Bonaparte at Morfontaine (1801-02).

head. In the preface to *Delphine* the Genius of Christianity is alluded to as a book "whose original, conspicuous, extraordinary imaginative power must be the admiration even of its foes." M. de Chateaubriand, in an article for the *Mercure* on M. de Bonald (December, 1802) briefly notices this eulogium of Mme. de Staël's, but amid mutual homage they still maintain the same adverse position.¹ Yet are not these two noble names like two heights on the opposite banks of a stream, once, for a brief space, the scene of warlike operations, beneath which hostile bands gathered for assault and struggle, but which, seen from posterity's distant point of view, seem to approach and almost to unite, constituting a double triumphal column at the entrance of the century? We, the generations who have arrived since the days of the Martyrs and Corinne, we all of us, in presence of their inseparable fames, experience the filial sentiment of which Lamartine has constituted himself the interpreter in his *Destinies of Poesy*.

Although in natural gifts and artistic style there are wide differences between Mme. de Staël and M. de Chateaubriand, we are also struck by the essential resemblance which they present; both loving liberty, impatient of the same tyranny and capable of feeling the grandeur of the popular destiny, without abjuring their aristocratic memories and proclivities, both laboring for the restoration of the religious sentiment in ways which were rather divergent than contrary. At the epoch of the Restoration they met again. Mme. de

¹ M. de Chateaubriand, however, receives honorable and simple mention in two places in Mme. de Staël's *Germany*, Part I., Chapter 1, and Part IV., Chapter 4.

Duras¹ became a sort of link between them, and it was to Chateaubriand that Mme. de Staël was able to utter in her last illness these beautiful words: "I have always been the same, intense and sorrowful. I have loved God, my father, and liberty." Nevertheless politics divided them at that time, as philosophy had done before. In the *Considerations on the French Revolution*, which appeared shortly after the author's death, M. de Chateaubriand is not named, and in the *Conservateur* for December, 1819, we find one of his tributes to Mme. de Staël thoroughly respectful and becoming, but reserved and cool in its admiration, — the tribute, in short, of an absolutely courteous foe. This too protracted discord is at an end. A woman² who by a singular coincidence first saw M. de Chateaubriand at Mme. de Staël's house, and who met him for the second time at the same place in 1814, has become the bond of sympathy between them. Through his noble attachment to this intimate friend of Mme. de Staël's, — herself the object of so much tender regard, — M. de Chateaubriand has been led to modify and enlarge his original view of a character and talents which he now understands better than formerly. The old barriers have fallen. The preface to *Historical Studies* gives proof of this more thorough understanding, but

¹ Mme. de Staël had a singular fancy for Mme. de Duras, whom she found to be, what she was herself, a genuine person in a factitious circle. I have seen an affecting note which she addressed to the latter, June 26, 1817, that is, eighteen days before her death, and which she dictated to her son Auguste, being already too weak to write. She herself adds below, in a large, irregular, tremulous hand, "My best compliments to René."

² Mme. Récamier.

that final monument of his powers which he is now preparing will contain a portrait and an estimate of Mme. de Staël the most enviable and exhaustive ever offered to a memory like hers. Amid much that is sorrowful, there is at least this consolation about surviving one's illustrious contemporaries, when one is illustrious one's self, and reverent of human glory; leisure and opportunity are afforded to crown their pictures, to repair their statues, to sacrifice at their graves. The warm panegyrics of M. de Chateaubriand on Mme. de Staël, his pilgrimage to Coppet in 1831 with the devoted friend who formed the sacred tie between them, whom he did not accompany into the depths of that asylum of the dead, but who, unwilling to display her grief, desired to enter the cemetery alone, — this occurring beside the Lake of Geneva, so near the scenes immortalized by the artist of Julie, will constitute, in the eyes of posterity, an impressive and memorable funeral service. Let us not fail to note, for the honor of our age, these pious alliances between rivals in genius, — Göthe and Schiller, Scott and Byron, Chateaubriand and Mme. de Staël. Voltaire insulted Jean Jacques, and the voice of humanity, as Chénier says, alone reconciles them. Racine and Molière, between whom there was no love, were silent about one another, and we owe them a grudge for their virtuous propriety. Surely there is a higher degree of poetic grandeur in what we see to-day.

II.

AFTER the publication of the work on Literature, Mme. de Staël passed into a state of mind, and yielded to the inspiration of a free and noble ambition, whose influence lasted almost without interruption until about the year 1811, — at which period a great and grave change was wrought within her. In the earlier and more exclusively sentimental mood in which we have seen her, Mme. de Staël had scarcely considered literature in any other light than as an organ of feeling — an exhalation of sorrow. She complained of calumny, and it made her desperate. She passed from ill-sustained stoicism to eloquent lamentation. She wanted love: she anticipated death. But presently she perceived that we do not die of suffering, however severe; that the faculties of the mind and the powers of the soul grow fast in sorrow; that she never was to be loved with a love like her own; and yet that she must propose to herself some great life-work. She then formed a solemn resolution to make full use of her faculties and talents, and not to be cast down; — and while there was yet time, and her sun had barely passed its meridian, her genius determined to tread proudly the years of middle life. “Let us, then,” she cries, in the preface to the book so often quoted, “let us, then, stand up under the weight of existence! Let us not give our unjust enemies and our ungrateful friends the triumph of having crushed our intellectual forces. Those who would have been content with affection they reduce to the strife for glory. Well, then, it shall be won!” Henceforth her heart was

confessedly divided between sentiment and ambition. Society had always been much to her. Europe now became something, and she aspired to arduous undertakings on the stage of this vast theatre. Her noble craft, smitten by storm when first it issued from port, and long anchored in sight of the shore, became impatient of waiting and hoisting signals of distress, spread its sails, and ventured upon the open sea. *Delphine*, *Corinne*, and *Germany* were the successive conquests that crowned this glorious adventure. Mme. de Staël, in 1800, was still young, but for that youth of more than thirty years there were no more illusions, — there was no longer a future. She made haste, therefore, to substitute the boundless expanse of fame for the circumscribed and already fading horizon of youth. Thus the latter melted into the former and was perpetuated, and she walked in full possession of her powers during those years which are the most luminous of life, but which we do not count. *Corinne*, and the moment succeeding its appearance, mark the culminating point in the history of Mme. de Staël. Every human life which rises above the ordinary level has its sacred hill; every illustrious and regnant existence its capitol. The capitol, the Cape Miseno of *Corinne*, is also that of Mme. de Staël. From that time onward the swift flight of the remnant of her youth, her growing persecutions, the utter failure of some of her friendships, the cooling of most, — last, but not least, illness, — all these things helped, as we shall see, to mature her talent more perfectly, and to initiate the sombre years of her victorious and majestic genius. After 1811, especially, if we search the depths of Mme. de Staël's being, we shall come by degrees to perceive religion made welcome —

the fruits of sorrow ripening, the strength born of self-control. We shall see a soul, hitherto turbulent as an ocean, now become as obedient too, — restrained by righteous effort within its proper bounds. In a word, at the close of this triumphal progress, as at that of the humblest Christian walk, we shall see a cross. But now we are only arrived at the end of her dreams of sentiment, her romantic hopes and delusions, at her years of full activity and triumph.

If the effect of the work on Literature was what we have described, the romance of *Delphine*, published towards the close of 1802, was no less successful. We can judge how fascinating its perusal must have been to a society excited by all manner of political vicissitudes, and conflicts of opposing fates; at the era of the concordat, and the modification of the divorce-law, — when the Genius of Christianity had just restored religious discussion to an honorable place in literature. Benjamin Constant has said that Mme. de Staël reveals herself most clearly in the pages consecrated to her father. But so it always seems, whatever book of hers we read. In the volume last opened we find most of her. Still, I think it is peculiarly true of *Delphine*. "Corinne," says Mme. Necker de Saussure, "is Mme. de Staël's ideal. *Delphine* is the reality of her youth." *Delphine* is a touching personification of Mme. de Staël's years of pure sentiment and tenderness, up to the moment when she wrenched herself from the old life, with a last heart-rending farewell, to enter upon her public reign, — her glorious European rôle, — a kind of statue of Ariadne standing aghast before the temple of Theseus.

The design of the author of *Delphine* was to produce

a moral and analytical romance, — passionate, but perfectly true to nature. For my own part, delicious as I find its every page, I prefer a less natural, less realistic tale, such a one as Mme. de Staël herself foreshadowed in her Essay on Fiction. The story in question has some of the faults of the *Nouvelle Héloïse*, and its epistolary form entails too much of formality and literary method. One of the disadvantages of a novel in the form of letters is, that the personages are obliged at the very outset to assume a tone too entirely in harmony with their supposed characters. In the first letter of Mathilde her stern, hard character must needs be outlined ; and there she is, in all her devout rigidity. For fear, however, of a possible misunderstanding, Delphine, in her reply, speaks of that ascetic rule of life, needful, perhaps, *to a nature less mild*. Now, such things are not spoken or written all at once between people used to the world, like Delphine and Mathilde. Léonce, in his first letter to M. Barton, expatiates at length on that *prejudice in favor of honor*, which is his distinctive trait. But in real life personal characteristics are revealed by circumstances, gradually and successively, and the opposite fashion imparts to the most entertaining romance an air of mannerism and conventionality. So in the *Nouvelle Héloïse*, all the letters of *Claire d'Orbe* are rigorously sprightly and playful. Humor is in order from the very first line. In a word, the characters in an epistolary romance, from the moment they assume the pen, are always studying to present to the reader their most expressive attitudes and significant profiles, and unless one gives himself full scope, and is as deliberate and diffuse as the author of *Clarissa Harlowe*, the resultant groups are slightly stiff and classical.

And then there is the fact that, however unnatural and trying to the feelings it may be, the characters are obliged to shut themselves up and write, when they have neither the time nor the strength to do so, as when confined to their beds, or just recovering from a swoon, &c. But allowing for this error of form in *Delphine*, what delicacy and passion in the whole book! what overflowing sensibility! what subtle discrimination of character! Apropos of its characters, the world of that day could not refrain from seeking portraits among them. I do not myself think that complete portraits are often drawn by novelists of fertile imagination. They merely copy more or less of the leading traits, and these soon become transformed, and attain a new development. The author and creator of the characters alone could indicate the secret, sinuous line where invention joins memory. At that time, however, some existing model had to be sought and designated for every figure. If *Delphine* evidently resembled Mme. de Staël, where were the originals, if not of the purely ideal Léonce, at least of M. Lebensei, Mme. de Cerlèbe, Mathilde, Mme. de Vernon? In Mme. de Cerlèbe, devoted to domestic life and the monotony of quiet duties, and deriving infinite enjoyment from the education of her children, people discovered a likeness to Mme. Necker de Saussure, who, moreover, like Mme. de Cerlèbe, was a worshipper of her father. They thought they recognized in M. Lebensei, — the Protestant gentleman with English manners, — that “most remarkable man intellectually whom one could possibly meet,” a striking similarity of expression to Benjamin Constant; but, in that case, only the brilliant features of the portrait could have been like, and at least half the

praise accorded to the solid qualities of M. Lebensei, could only have been addressed to his presumed prototype in the form of admonition and regret. As for Mme. de Vernon, the best-drawn character in the book, the world, following the example of Chénier and all the critics, was resolved to discover in her the portrait, reversed and in feminine disguise, of that most famous of our politicians, whose name Mme. de Staël had caused to be the first erased from the list of *émigrés* whom she had thrust into power before the 18th of Fructidor, and who had repaid her warm and active friendship by a calculating and courteous selfishness. At the time *Delphine* was written, that incident of the dinner mentioned in *Ten Years of Exile*, had already taken place. "On the day," says Mme. de Staël, "when the signal for opposition was given in the Tribune by one of my friends, I had invited to my house several persons whose society I particularly enjoyed, but who were all adherents of the new government. At five o'clock I received ten notes of excuse. The first and the second I read with tolerable equanimity, but when the others followed I began to feel disturbed." The man whom she had so generously served deserted her, then and there, with that air of mere ceremony with which we decline an invitation to dinner. Admitted to new honors, he was very careful not to commit himself to the support of her whom he was soon to expatriate. What do I say? He may have justified her to the *Hero*, but he did it after that dubious fashion which succeeded so well with Mme. de Vernon, when she justified Delphine to M. Léonce. But Mme. de Staël, like Delphine, could not live and not forgive. In 1808, she appealed to this same individual from Vienna, as to an old and

reliable friend.¹ She recalled the past without bitterness. "Thirteen years ago you wrote me from America, 'If I remain here a year longer I shall die!' I might say the same of my life among strangers. I shall succumb to it." And then she adds these words, so full of sorrowful clemency: "Adieu! Are you happy? With your superior mind, do you not sometimes go down into the depths of life,—that is to say, until you come to pain?" But without venturing to maintain that Mme. de Vernon, as a whole, is a slightly caricatured portrait, without meaning too entirely to identify with the model in question that adroit woman, whose fascinating amiability always leaves one with a parched and discontented feeling; that woman, whose conduct is so complex, while her conversation is so simple; who is sweet when she speaks, and dreamy when she is silent; who uses her intellect in discourse only, and never in reading or reflection; who has no refuge from ennui save in play, &c., &c.,—without going so far as this, it has been impossible for me not to notice the applicability to his case of one more innocent attribute. "No one," says Mme. de Vernon, on one occasion (Letter 29, Part I.), "knows better than I how to make indolence available. It enables me easily to foil the activity of others. I have not taken the trouble to wish for anything four times in the course of my life; but when I do make that exertion, nothing can turn me from my end, and you may be sure I shall attain it." I could not help remarking how well this sentence described the clever laziness of the much-lauded individual alluded to, when

¹ See the *Revue Rétrospective*, No. 9, June, 1834.

one evening I heard a witty *diplomat* questioned as to whether he would soon repair to his post. "I am in no hurry," he replied; "I mean to wait a while. When I was quite young," he added, "M. de Talleyrand gave me, as an invariable rule of conduct, 'Never be zealous'!" Is not this precisely the principle of Mme. de Vernon?

Since we are on the subject of those traits in Delphine which are copied from real life, let us not forget one which fully reveals the self-sacrificing spirit of Mme. de Staël. At the *dénouement* of the story (I speak of the old *dénouement*, which remains the finest and the only one), the heroine, after having exhausted every form of supplication to the judge of Léonce, observes that the child of the magistrate is ill, and gives utterance to the sublime cry, "Well, then, if you deliver Léonce to the tribunal, your child will die! He will *die*!" This word of Delphine's was actually uttered by Mme. de Staël, when, after the 18th of Fructidor, she hastened to General Lemoine, to implore him to pardon a young man whose life she knew to be in danger, and who was no other than M. de Norvins. The love of her kind held impetuous sway within her, and, once alarmed, it left her no peace. In 1802, in her anxiety for Chénier,¹ who was threatened with proscription, she made haste to offer him an asylum, money, and a passport. How often, in '92, and at all times, do we see her thus! "My political opinions," she once said, "are proper names." No: her political opinions were assuredly principles; but proper names

¹ See the notice of M. J. Chénier, in the introduction to his works, by M. Daunou.

—that is, persons, friends, the obscure and unknown, all that lived and suffered — were the objects of her generous care; and she knew no such thing as an abstract principle of justice before which human sympathy is silent.

When *Delphine* appeared, criticism could not contain itself. All those opinions on religion, politics, and marriage, which were dated '90 and '92 in the book, were, in fact, singularly apt in 1802, and touched on newly-kindled animosities. The *Journal des Débats* for December, 1802, published an article signed A., — that is, M. de Feletz, — a quizzical, bitter-sweet sort of effusion, abounding in jests, but strictly courteous. The drawing-room critic became the organ of the reproaches of good society in its *renaissance*. "Nothing could be more dangerous and immoral than the principles which pervade this work. Forgetting the ideas in which, although belonging to a Protestant family, she was reared, the daughter of M. Necker, the author of Religious Opinions, expresses her contempt for Revelation, and the child of Mme. Necker, the author of a work against divorce, becomes a profuse apologist for divorce." *Delphine* was summed up as "a very bad book, written with much ability and power." This article was evidently deemed insufficient, for, a few days later, — on the 4th and 7th of January, 1803, — the same sheet inserted two letters addressed to Mme. de Staël, and signed "An Admirer." They are from the pen of M. Michaud. This man of talent and taste, who was induced to make these attacks in his youth, under the inspiration of party feeling and the excitement of by-gone quarrels, on which he now looks back with a smile, must excuse us if we remark his too

offensive virulence. The first letter deals with the characters of the story, which is pronounced immoral. Delphine is likened to the heroine of a scurrilous romance, with whom, in our own day, there has been an attempt to compare Lelia. The second letter is aimed more particularly at the style. It is perfectly self-confident, and its cavalier tone is somewhat amusing. "What a sentiment is love! What another life in life!" "When your characters make doleful reflections on the past, one exclaims, 'I have spoiled my life!' another, 'I have missed my life!' a third, intensifying the sentiment of the two others, 'I felt that I alone had understood life thoroughly.'"¹ "Sublimity of principle," "images based on eternal ideas," "the soil of the ages," "the soul's limits," "the mysteries of fate," "souls exiled from love," — phraseology like this, which in some cases is tender, spiritualistic, and, of course, allowable, and in others Genevese, incoherent, and in very questionable taste, is ridiculed at length in the article in question. M. de Feletz had noticed a few real inaccuracies of style, and a few words, such as *insistance*, *persistence*, *vulgarity*, which have passed, notwithstanding his veto. In fact, one may detect in *Delphine* repetitions, consonances, — a host of oft-recurring little faults, which Mme. de Staël

¹ Curious and impartial readers will find a justification of Mme. de Staël on this point, and, in general, a thoroughly appreciative notice of *Delphine*, in a book which I have already quoted — "*Notice et Souvenirs Biographiques du Comte Van der Duyn*, 1852." On page 386, in the journal of his readings kept by this worthy Hollander, there is a fragment, full of good sense, "on certain innovations in style with which Mme. de Staël has been reproached."

never took pains to avoid, and into which an artist in composition never falls.

Mme. de Staël, to whom the word *rancor* had no meaning, granted a graceful amnesty to the author of the Letters of an Admirer, when she met him at a later period, at M. Suard's, in that neutral and peace-making *salon* of a gifted man, who has himself become memorable through the duty which devolved upon him of defending successive contemporary reputations. The journal then edited by M. Suard, — the *Publiciste*, — although, considering its own literary habits, it might consistently have cavilled at *Delphine* on certain points of language and of taste, took no part in the quarrel, and showed itself entirely favorable in a very genial article by M. Hochet.

At about the same time the *Mercure* published a piece signed F., but so acrimonious that the *Journal de Paris*, which, by the pen of M. Villetterque, had judged the novel with sufficient severity, especially from a moral point of view, could not conceal its astonishment that an article of this stamp should have appeared in the *Mercure*, side by side with a fragment of La Harpe's, and over the initial of a name dear to the friends of taste and decency. We read, for instance (and I have not selected the worst passage), "Delphine talks of love like a *bacchante*, of God like a Quaker, of death like a grenadier, of morality like a sophist." Fontanes, who found himself designated as the writer by virtue of the initial, wrote to the *Journal de Paris* to disown the article, which was really by the author of Frederic and Suzette's Dowry. Have we not, in our own day, seen language equally outrageous and almost identical, employed against the woman most famous in literature

since the author of *Delphine*? In the *Débats* of February 12, 1803, Gaston notices a pamphlet in eight hundred octavo pages (is this a joke of the journalist?), entitled *Delphine Converted*, from which he gives some extracts, and in which Mme. de Staël is made to say, "I have entered upon the career which several women have pursued with success; but I have taken for my model neither the *Princesse de Clèves*, nor *Caroline*, nor *Adèle de Sénange*." This slanderous *brochure*, where envy inflates itself into a bulky volume, appears, if indeed it ever existed, to have been merely a collection of incongruous phrases, pilfered from Mme. de Staël, and so tacked together as utterly to distort their meaning. Mme. de Genlis, when, on her return from Altona, she set up as a preacher of morality, published in the *Bibliothèque des Romans* a lengthy tale, in which, by the help of mangled quotations and artificial interpretations, she represented Mme. de Staël as an apologist for suicide. Mme. de Staël, who, on her part, quoted *Mlle. de Clermont* with high praise, revenges herself only by saying, "She attacks me and I extol her, and so our correspondence grows." Subsequently, in her *Recollections*, Mme. de Genlis reproached Mme. de Staël with ignorance, as she had previously reproached her with immorality; but, fortunately, she at length repented in a benevolent novel, called *Athenais*, to which we shall again allude. She had been touched by a more genial influence, and one prolific of such pleasant miracles.

We crave pardon for having neglected, in our notice of a pathetic story like *Delphine*, the melancholy scenes of Bellerive and the garden of the Champs Elysées, while recalling the sharp clamor that greeted its ap-

pearance, and stirring up such a cloud of ancient dust; but it is well, if we would follow the line of a triumphal march, to endure the pressure of the crowd, and show the car surrounded and saluted as it really was.

Violence calls for repression. The friends of Mme. de Staël were indignant, and she was energetically defended. The first of Ginguené's two articles in the *Décade* opens thus: "It is long since any work has so engrossed the mind of the public as this romance. This sort of success is not difficult of attainment, but one almost always has to suffer for it. A certain number of journals, whose opinion of a book is predetermined by the mere name of the author, have made a desperate attack upon *Delphine*, or, rather, upon Mme. de Staël. They have assailed a woman, one with the brutality of a student (Ginguené seems to have attributed to Geoffroy, whom he had in his mind, one of the hostile articles mentioned above), another with the mockery of a low wit, all with the freedom of a careless security." After numerous quotations intermixed with eulogy, when he comes to the question of unnatural expressions and neologic forms of speech, Ginguené judiciously remarks, "Strictly speaking, these are not so much slips of the pen as vices of style, which a woman of so much wit and genius might easily cast aside if she would." What Ginguené did not notice, but what should have been adduced in reply to the trite accusations of impiety and immorality, vociferated by coarse or priggish critics, is the sublime eloquence of the religious ideas expressed in many passages in *Delphine*, as if in emulation of the Catholic theories of the Genius of Christianity. Witness the third part of the fourteenth letter of *Delphine* to

Léonce, where she invites him to share the faith of natural religion and the common hope of immortality; and also the fourth part of the seventeenth letter, in which M. Lebensci, writing to Delphine, opposes the Christian idea of being made perfect through suffering, and invokes the law of nature as winning man to virtue by the sweetest and most alluring charm. Delphine, however, does not acknowledge herself convinced. She cannot believe that the benevolent system thus unfolded will meet all the actual exigencies of fate, or that virtue and happiness tread the same path in this world. Of course it is not the Catholicism of Thérèse d'Ervins which prevails in Delphine. Her system is Deistical and Protestant, with a Unitarian Protestantism not very unlike that of the Savoyard Vicaire; but among all the Pharisees who cried out on her impiety, I have discovered none who would not have gained immensely, in a moral and religious point of view, by adopting her faith, philosophical and naturalistic though it be, in place of their own. As for the accusation brought against *Delphine* of attacking the institution of marriage, it has rather seemed to me that the most salient idea in the book was the desire for happiness in marriage, a profound conviction of the impossibility of happiness elsewhere, along with an acknowledgment of the obstacles, in the form of discordant social destinies, on which, despite all possible virtue and tenderness, shipwreck is oftenest made. This dream of *happiness in marriage* always haunted Mme. de Staël, as the thought of romantic situations from which they are excluded haunts and agitates other minds. In the chapter on Love, in the Influence of the Passions, she speaks feelingly of an aged mar-

ried pair whom she had met in England, and who were *still lovers*. In the work on Literature, with what admiration she quotes the beautiful lines at the close of the first canto of Thomson's *Spring*, describing that perfect union which for her was ideal and unattainable! And in one of the chapters of Germany, she reverts to the subject with an accent of solemnity, and, as it were, of gratitude, very poignant when one compares the page with the private circumstances that inspired it. The pleasing picture of the Belmont family in *Delphine* is but a representation of that domestic Eden towards which, amid her stormy days, she was ever yearning. M. Necker, in his *Course of Religious Ethics*, is also fond of dwelling on this theme of happiness secured by sacred ties. Mme. de Staël, as she returned again and again to the same dream, had not far to go to seek its prototype. Her unselfish heart embraced the world; and in default of her own personal felicity, she recalled that of her mother, or anticipated and foreshadowed that of her daughter.

And yet, when all has been said in its justification, it must be confessed that *Delphine* is a disquieting book; but the disquiet to which we would not expose perfect innocence is often only a salutary stimulus to feeling in souls that were being fast usurped by stern realities and a dreary disenchantment. Blessed be the disquiet that tends to revive within us youth's tender feelings and capacity for self-devotion!

In return for the kindly courtesies of the *Décade*, and the help she always received from the writers of the philosophic and literary school it represented, Mme. de Staël has never failed in her writings to speak well of them. Aside from Chénier, on whom she is rather

severe in her Considerations, she has never mentioned a single member of the group in question save with respect, and as one who remembers an old alliance. But her exile near the close of 1803, her travels, her regal life at Coppet, her aristocratic connections in Germany, whose influence there was now less than formerly to outweigh—all these things helped henceforth to thrust her into a new sphere, and soon dissipated that transient inspiration of the year III. which we have endeavored to seize and fix. Forced to quit Paris, she turned her steps at once towards Germany, and betook herself to the study of the German language and literature. She visited Weimar and Berlin, and made the acquaintance of Göthe and the Prussian princes. She also collected the original materials for the work which a second journey in 1807–8 enabled her to complete. Thus to leap the Rhine at a single bound was to break abruptly with the irritated Bonaparte. It was also to cut herself loose from those habits of eighteenth-century philosophy whereof she had just seemed to make conspicuous choice. But this is the way of great minds. While we suppose them to be still at a given pole, they have already passed to the opposite. Like rapid and tireless generals, they light their fires upon the hills, and we imagine that they are encamped behind them, while in reality they are many leagues advanced on the march by which they are to outflank us. Mme. de Staël was suddenly recalled to Coppet by the death of her father. When the season of her first mourning was passed, and M. Necker's manuscripts had been published, she once more set out (in the year 1804) to visit Italy. The love of nature and the fine arts took shape within her under

these new skies. Delphine somewhere confesses that she has little love for painting, and that when she walks in a garden, she cares far more for the urns and the tombs than for nature itself. But the autumnal mist that folded the horizon of Bellerive vanishes beneath the radiance of the Roman heaven. All the gifts, all the muses, which are to wait on the steps of Corinne, make haste to appear.

Returned to Coppet in 1805, and busy with her romance-poem, Mme. de Staël found it impossible to live any longer at a distance from that unique Parisian centre where she had once shone, and where she aspired to win renown. It was the earliest manifestation of that growing unrest, that homesickness for the capital, which doubtless detracts somewhat from the dignity of her exile, but which shows, at least, the passionate sincerity of all her emotions. A police order forbade her coming within forty leagues of Paris. Instinctively, obstinately, like the noble steed forever straining his tether, or the unfortunate fly that buzzes and beats the pane unceasingly, she lingered on the fatal limit, at Auxerre, at Châlons, at Blois, at Saumur. Her devious walks with her friends along that circumference, which she was always trying to contract, became a piece of skilful strategy. It was like playing a game of chess with Bonaparte and Fouché, represented by some more or less rigorous prefect. If she can establish herself at Rouen, she has won a momentary triumph, for she has abbreviated, by some leagues, the geometric radius. But these provincial towns offer few resources to a mind so active, so hungry for the pure Athenian speech and accent. The contempt for pettiness and mediocrity generally seized upon and

suffocated her. She verified and commented to satiety on Picard's pretty poem. The marvellous conversation of Benjamin Constant hardly sufficed to exorcise her melancholy. "Poor Schlegel," she says, "is dying of *ennui*. Benjamin Constant gets on better with the brutes." So, during her visit to Germany in 1808, she said, "There is more instruction, possibly more enlightenment, and a better state of things in general here, than in France; but a morsel of France would be better for me." Two years before, she had not said as much for provincial France; but probably she spoke only of Paris, which was all of France to her. Finally — thanks to Fouché, whose principle it was to do as little needless harm as possible — she found means to fix her residence eighteen leagues from Paris (what a victory!), at Acosta, the estate of Mme. de Castellane, where she watched the impression produced by *Corinne*. As she returned the proofs of the volume, she must often have exclaimed with Ovid, "Go, my book, my happy book, that goest to the town without me!" "O for the stream of the Rue du Bac!"¹ she cried, when some one pointed to the mirrored Lemane. At Acosta, as at Coppet, this was the burden of her song. More longingly than ever she stretched out her arms towards the shore that was now so near.² The year

¹ Mme. de Staël lived, before her exile, in the Rue de Grenelle-Saint-Germain, near the Rue du Bac.

² A taste for rural nature was never a part of Mme. de Staël's being; and that persistent thought of the Rue du Bac sufficed to spoil all her pleasure in the country. One day, at Acosta, when she was walking with the two Schlegels and M. Fauriel, the latter, on whose arm she was leaning, paused involuntarily to admire the view. "So, my dear Fauriel," said she, "you are still

1806 appeared so long that her imagination refused to conceive another such season of torture; and one night she actually came to Paris, taking only a few friends with her, and apprising but a few of her arrival. Every evening and a part of the night she walked out by moonlight, not daring to venture forth by day. During this adventurous incursion she was seized by a capricious but characteristically vehement desire to see a certain distinguished lady, — an old and well-remembered friend of her father's, — Mme. de Tessé — the same who said, "If I were queen, I would order Mme. de Staël to talk to me all the time." This lady, however, who was then very aged, was terrified at the idea of receiving Mme. de Staël when under proscription, and the result of the step was a series of indiscretions which ended in an intimation to Fouché. It became necessary to depart at once, and to risk no more moonlight walks along the quays, beside the favorite stream, and around that square of Louis XV. so familiar to Delphine. The publication of *Corinne* soon came to confirm and redouble the severity of Mme. de Staël's first exile, and we find her relegated to Coppet, where, after all, she appears in her true dignity, as the centre of her majestic court.

prejudiced in favor of the country?" Then, becoming sensible that she had said something extraordinary, she smiled apologetically. Long afterwards, in the days of the empire, she was one day conversing with M. Molé, and, in her amazement that so intellectual a man should be fond of the country, she let fall the remark, "Were it not for the opinion of men, I would not open my window to see the Bay of Naples for the first time; but I would travel five hundred leagues to talk with a man of talent whom I had never met;" which was a piquant and flattering way of telling how greatly she preferred conversation and society to nature.

What the life of Ferney was to Voltaire that of Coppet was to Mme. de Staël; but to us the latter has more of the halo of poetry, and presents a more imposing type of existence. Both reign in their exile; but the one, on the plain at the foot of his somewhat shabby chateau, in view of his clipped and scanty gardens, ridicules and subverts. The influence of Coppet is (Tancred and the adorable Amenaïde apart) precisely contrary. It is the influence of Jean Jacques continued under a nobler form, assuming and bearing sway near the very seats of his rival's power. Coppet counteracts and almost dethrones Ferney. We of the present century rank Ferney below Coppet. The beauty of the situation, the shady woods, the sex of the poet, the enthusiasm which pervades the air, the elegance of the company, the glorious names, the rambles by the lake, the mornings in the park, the storms and the mysteries which we fancy to have been inevitable,—all these things help to enchant our conception of that residence. Coppet is the Elysium with which all the soul-children of Jean Jacques would fain endow the lady of their dreams. Mme. de Genlis, repenting of her early sins, and desirous to atone for them, has attempted to describe, in a novel entitled, *Athenais, or Coppet in 1807*, the customs and some of the delicate complications of that life which so charms the imagination at a distance. But it would be vain to seek for anything like faithful portraiture in this otherwise agreeable production. The dates are confused, the characters artificially grouped, the parts they have to play predetermined. M. von Schlegel becomes a mere clown. He is sacrificed ruthlessly and without taste. All things are displayed in a light of false

romance, which, in our view, differs as much from genuine poetry as from reality. For my own part, I should prefer a few reliable details, out of which the imaginations of those who were not there to see might shape a dream of pleasing probabilities. Life at Coppet was the life of a chateau. There were often as many as thirty people in the house, including strangers and friends. The most frequent visitors were Benjamin Constant, August Wilhelm von Schlegel, M. de Sabran, M. de Sismondi, M. de Bonstetten, the Barons de Voigt and Balk, &c. Once every year, and sometimes oftener, came M. Matthieu de Montmorency, M. Prosper de Barante, Prince Augustus of Prussia, the celebrated beauty whom Mme. de Genlis forthwith designated as Athenais, and a throng of people of fashion, and German and Genevese acquaintances. The discussions on philosophic and literary subjects, invariably high-toned and pungent, commenced at eleven o'clock in the morning, the hour when the company assembled for breakfast. They were resumed at dinner, or in the interval between dinner and supper, which was at eleven in the evening, and often prolonged until midnight. Benjamin Constant and Mme. de Staël were the principal interlocutors. Benjamin Constant — whom we of a later day saw almost invariably *blasé*, alternating between a too reckless cynicism¹ and a slightly factitious enthusiasm, always a marvellously witty conversationist, but one in whom intellect at length absorbed all the more potent faculties and passions — here comes out naturally and brilliantly, what Mme. de Staël declared him, in her un-

¹ In this mood of mind, too finical and satirical to be pleasing, he wrote certain pages in the *Livre des Cent-et-Un*, vol. vii.

biassed judgment, to be — *the first of living minds*. He was certainly the greatest of that circle of distinguished men. His mind and hers were always congenial, and hence sure of mutual comprehension. Nothing — if we may believe the testimony of those present — was ever more wonderful and dazzling than the converse of these two in the midst of that select circle. Holding the magic battledores of speech, they kept up for hours, without once missing, the flying shuttlecocks of countless intersecting thoughts. But it must not be supposed that the world of Coppet was always either sentimental or solemn. Often it was simply gay. Corinne had her days of perfect unreserve, when she resembled the Signora Fantastici. Tragedies and dramas were often acted at Coppet — the *Zaire* or *Tancred* of Voltaire, whose illustrations of chivalry were such favorites with Mme. de Staël, or some piece composed for the occasion by herself or one of her friends. The latter were often printed in Paris, that the parts might be more easily learned, and their arrival awaited with keen interest; while if important improvements were suggested in the interval, a courier was despatched in haste, and in some cases a second, to recall or modify the correction already on the way. European poetry had its distinguished representatives at Coppet. One of the originals of that court, whose dramas, especially the *Attila*, were played by a numerous corps of German ladies, — Zacharias Werner, — wrote as follows to Counsellor Schneffer at about this time (we suppress sundry details, in which the irresistibly sensuous and voluptuous imagination of the poet-mystic revels too unrestrainedly): “Mme. de Staël is a queen; and the men of intellect who live in her circle

cannot withdraw from it, for she detains them by a species of magic. These men are not, as is foolishly supposed in Germany, all occupied in forming her. It is she who is giving them a social education. She possesses in an admirable degree the secret of uniting the most incongruous elements. Those who approach her may differ widely in opinion, but they agree in their adoration of this idol. Mme. de Staël is of medium height, and her form, without possessing a nymph-like elegance, is noble in its proportions. She is a vigorous brunette, and her countenance is not, strictly speaking, handsome. But all that is forgotten when we meet her superb eyes, wherein a great and divine soul not merely shines, but emits fire and flame. And when she speaks from the depths of her heart, as she so often does, and we see how that mighty heart dwarfs even her vast and profound intellect, then indeed one must needs worship her, like my friends, August Wilhelm von Schlegel, Benjamin Constant, &c.” It may be worth while to recall the image of this gallant portrait-painter of Werner, queerly dressed and persistently besmeared with snuff, furnished with an enormous snuff-box, on which he drew copiously during his long erotic and Platonic harangues on androgynicity. His destiny he declared was to revolve unceasingly about his other half; and from experiment to experiment, and divorce to divorce, he went cheerfully on, never despairing of the final restoration of his pristine integrity. The Danish poet, Œlenschläger, has left us a minute account of a visit he paid at Coppet, where he speaks in a similar manner of the excellent Werner. We borrow from his story a few additional items:—

“Mme. de Staël met me cordially, and begged me to

pass some weeks at Coppet, gracefully rallying me the while on my mistakes in French. I then began to speak German. She understood that language readily, as did her two children, who also spoke it with ease. I found at Mme. de Staël's, Benjamin Constant, August Schlegel, the venerable Baron Voigt d'Altona, Bonstetten of Geneva, the famous Simonde de Sismondi, and the Count de Sabran, the only individual in the company who did not know German. Schlegel seemed to me polished but cold. Mme. de Staël was not pretty, but in the brilliancy of her black eyes there was an irresistible charm. She possessed in a very marked degree the power of subjugating headstrong characters, and of reconciling by her amiability those who were utterly antagonistic. She had a strong voice and somewhat masculine features, but her soul was refined and tender. She was at that time writing her book on Germany, and read us an extract from it every day. She was accused of not having studied in person the books referred to in this work, and of being entirely guided by the judgment of Schlegel. The accusation is false. She read German with extreme facility. Schlegel of course had some influence over her, but she very often dissented from his opinions, and reproached him with his prejudices. Schlegel, in fact, with all his talent and erudition, which I highly respect, was imbued with prejudice. He placed Calderon above Shakspeare. He reflected with severity upon Luther and Herder. Like his brother, he was infatuated with aristocracy." If to all these qualities of Mme. de Staël's we add that she was wealthy and generous, it will seem no wonder that she should have lived in her enchanted castle like a fairy queen, whose magic wand was perhaps the little

green bough which a servant used every day to place beside her plate at table, and which she fluttered as she talked. In default of the leafy bough of sacred mistletoe, it was her fan, or a silver or ivory knife, or merely a little banner of paper, which she brandished in that sceptred but restless hand. With regard to Mme. de Staël's portrait, we may remark how entirely all the artists agree in its leading features, from Guibert to Oelenschläger and Werner. There are, moreover, two genuine and faithful painted portraits, which would enable us to dispense with all these pen-and-ink sketches—the likeness executed by Mme. Lebrun in 1807, which represents Mme. de Staël as Corinne, bare-headed, with curling hair, and a lyre in her hand, and the picture in the turban, by Gerard, composed after her death, but from a perfectly distinct recollection. Yet we have thought that it might not be uninteresting to collect a few rough draughts by different contemporary pens. We do not weary of comparing any number of such in the case of the loved and admired who are gone.¹

While the continental war lasted, English poetry could not be represented at that permanent congress of thought which held its sittings at Coppet; but it

¹ One essential characteristic of the vast hospitality of Coppet was the underlying order amid so much variety and diversion. You felt all the ease of wealth, without any of that excess which too often sheds a degrading and demoralizing influence around a brilliant existence. Here a disposing hand facilitated the stage arrangements, and gave free play to romance and poetry by a wise economy of means. In a word, people enjoyed the skilful management of a great fortune, without seeing the moving springs. The daughter of M. Necker, amid all the blended contrasts of her character, preserved this trait which she had inherited from her father.

appeared there in 1816 in the persons of Lewis and Lord Byron. The latter, in his *Recollections*, speaks affectionately and admiringly of Mme. de Staël, notwithstanding the levity of some of his allusions to the *oracle*. *Blasé* as he is, he concedes that she has made Coppet the pleasantest spot on earth by virtue of the company which she receives there, and that her talent is the life of the place. She, on her part, pronounced this man the most fascinating of Englishmen; adding, however, "I think he has just sensibility enough to enable him to wreck a woman's happiness."¹

But the highest, the unspeakable charm of Coppet in its most brilliant years—what you would fain reproduce, O young or disenchanted hearts, rebellious at the present, passionately enamoured of the past, and hungry for the ideal which you yourselves no longer hope to realize, you who, after all, as has been justly said, rank next to the children of genius on this earth, since you can appreciate and admire them even with tears—what you covet is the secret of the thoughts interchanged by those guests beneath the trees, the substance of those noontide talks along the fair and shady

¹ Near the place where she pronounces this judgment upon Byron, she says, as if by a natural association of ideas, "I do not like Benjamin Constant's book. I do not believe that all men are *Adolphes*: it is only vain men." Byron himself says in his *Recollections*, "I send you Benjamin Constant's *Adolphe*. It contains some melancholy truths, but, in my opinion, it is too sad a book ever to be popular. The first time I read it was in Switzerland, in 1816, to please Mme. de Staël." He then adds a word in contradiction of a false idea which had become current. The original of Ellenore was Mme. Lindsay, her whom M. de Chateaubriand, in his autobiography, calls "the last of the *Ninons*."

shore. A frequent guest at Coppet, although not one of those named above, when, in my fond curiosity, I questioned him on this head, replied, "One morning I left the castle, to breathe the fresh air. I had thrown myself down in the deep grass beside a sheet of water, in a very retired part of the park, and was gazing dreamily into the sky, when, all at once, I heard two voices. The conversation was earnest and intimate, and the speakers were drawing near. I wanted to make some noise, to warn them of my presence; but I hesitated until they paused, still talking, only a few paces from me, and then it was too late to interrupt them, and I was forced to listen to reproaches, explanations, promises, without revealing myself, or daring to draw breath." "Happy man!" I exclaimed; "and whose were the voices, and what did you hear?" But when the listener, deterred by a delicate scruple, returned me only half an answer, I checked my impetuosity. Let us leave it to the romantic imagination of our descendants to retouch these faded mysteries. We are still too near them. Let time elapse; let the aureole brighten above those hills, and the more and more densely wooded heights repeat in confused murmurs the voices of the past; and let us leave it to the fancy of a far distant day to paint the trouble and anguish of the souls that dwelt in that glorious Eden.

Corinne was brought out in 1807. Its success was instantaneous and universal; but the proofs of it are not to be sought in the press. Liberty even of literary criticism had almost ceased to exist. In these years, Mme. de Staël could not even get inserted in the *Mer-cure* a clever but simple analysis of M. de Barante's remarkable essay on the eighteenth century. We were

on the brink and under the menace of this absolute censorship when *Corinne* appeared. The autocrat's displeasure with the work,¹ which probably arose from the fact that its ideal enthusiasm could in no way be made to subserve his ends, sufficed to paralyze all printed eulogium. The *Publiciste*, however, the moderate organ of M. Suard's circle, and of philosophic liberty in intellectual matters, published three good articles, which must have been by Mlle. de Meulan (Mme. Guizot). Also, M. de Feletz, in the *Débats*, continued his timorous cavils and niggard politeness.² M. Boutard

¹ "If we may trust an anecdote," says M. Villemain, "the ruler of France was so disturbed by the stir this romance made, that he himself wrote a criticism on it, which was inserted in the *Moniteur*. He animadverted with severity on the sympathy lavished on Oswald, and took umbrage at it as unpatriotic. This sharp and clever critique is still in existence." I have searched in vain for this article, which probably did not bear the exact title of *Corinne*. I relinquish the joy of its discovery to the lovers of Napoleonic literature, who are beginning to recognize in their hero "the first writer of the age" (Thiers, Carrel, Hugo). Let us render unto Cæsar the things that are Cæsar's; but let us not award him every crown.

² Since I have had the honor, on my transition to the Mazarin Library, of meeting this witty representative of ancient criticism, I have been able to understand how real kindness, and rectitude, and nobility of heart were compatible in him with that pen-malice and those reckless jests so irritating to an author's vanity. M. de Feletz had this in common with the ordinary magazine critic—whatever was on his tongue's end he must utter. His principal fault, aside from his satire, which was usually well aimed, was that of utterly disregarding the more serious and elevated parts of a work, thereby greatly narrowing his range. A mere fashionable critic, he goes to the bottom of nothing; and if he has a witticism, he dilutes it, and so impairs its neatness. Mme. de Staël, who ordinarily was so little prone to cherish resent-

praised the book, judiciously excepting the opinions on the fine arts. An M. C., whose name I do not know, had an article in the *Mercure* without malevolence, but also without value. But what mattered to Mme. de Staël henceforth this inevitable criticism? With *Corinne* she made her final entry upon empire and renown.

There is a decisive moment in the history of all geniuses, when they become so firmly established that the eulogiums which they subsequently receive interest us no more than does the vanity or the reputation of those who bestow them. We are in their debt for the occasion of sounding their praise, and their names become an ornament to our discourse, like the golden vase which we borrow to adorn our dwelling. So it was with Mme. de Staël. After the appearance of *Corinne*, she was crowned by all Europe under that name. Well does *Corinne* illustrate the sovereign independence of genius — *Corinne*, who causes herself to be crowned at Rome, at the capitol of that Eternal City where the conqueror who exiled her was never to set foot! Mme. Necker de Saussure in a notice, Benjamin Constant in his *Miscellanies*, and M. J. Chénier in his *Tableau de la Littérature*, have analyzed the work in so appreciative a manner as to abridge our present task. “*Corinne*,” says Chénier, “is Delphine still, but Delphine matured and untrammelled, giving full scope to her powers, and always acting under the twofold inspiration of genius and love.” Yes; but for

ment, made an exception in the case of M. de Feletz. One day, when she saw him entering a drawing-room, she went out by another door. He had committed the one, by her, unpardonable sin: he had spoken ill of M. Necker.

Corinne, even glory is but a brilliant diversion — a vast occasion of conquering hearts. “In striving for renown,” she says to Oswald, “I have always hoped that it would bring me love.” The main idea of the book is the conflict between a noble, if sentimental ambition, and that desire for domestic happiness which was ever present with Mme. de Staël. No wonder that Corinne shines by moments like a priestess of Apollo, while in the daily intercourse of life she is the simplest of women — gay, versatile, susceptible of a thousand fancies, capable of the most graceful and effortless *abandon*; but for all her external and internal resources, she will never escape herself. From the moment when she feels herself seized by passion, by “that vulture-grip to which happiness and freedom succumb,” I admire her incapability of consolation, the sentiment which is stronger in her than genius, her frequent invocation of the sanctity and permanence of those ties which alone can prevent heart-rending separations. I love to hear her confess in the swan song of her dying hour, “Of all the faculties that were born with me, that of sorrow is the only one which I have exercised to the full.” This continuation of Delphine in Corinne is the most fascinating and endearing characteristic of the book to me. The noble framework which everywhere surrounds the experiences of this ardent and impressible soul enhances their effect by its severity. These names of lovers, no longer graven upon beech-stems, but inscribed on the walls of eternal ruins, are associated with a solemn history, and come to have a living share in its immortality. This divine passion of a being whom we cannot believe imaginary, introduces into the antique arena one more victim whom men will not forget. Genius,

whose child she was, becomes the last and not the least illustrious in the long list of victors.

One day, when Bernardin de Saint Pierre was walking with Rousseau, he asked the latter if Saint-Preux were not himself. "No," replied Jean Jacques, "Saint-Preux is not what I was, but what I would have liked to be." Almost all the poet-novelists might say the same. *Corinne* is what Mme. de Staël aspired to be, and what (save for the difference caused by an artificial grouping and arrangement of life) she really was. Not merely does she share with Corinne the capitol and the triumph. With her she will also die of sorrow.

The Rome and the Naples which Mme. de Staël interpreted after her own fashion in the romance-poem of *Corinne* were described almost simultaneously by M. de Chateaubriand in his epopee of the Martyrs. There is not the slightest tinge of Germany here. We enter with Eudora into the youth of antiquity. Everywhere we have pure and manly drawing, and a natural, primitive splendor of color. There is a learned and ingenious work of M. Ampère,¹ presenting a most thoroughly exhaustive comparison of the different ways in which Rome has been felt and described since Rome began to be a ruin.

Rome, Rome, with its marbles and its horizons,—a grander setting than we have elsewhere for less ephemeral thoughts!

A gifted person once wrote, "How I love the works of certain poets! They are like Rome—all or nothing. Either they become a part of our lives, or we fail to comprehend them." *Corinne* is only an imposing

¹ *Revue des Deux Mondes*, 1835, vols. ii. and iii.

variety of this worship of Rome, this habit of realizing distant epochs and different souls in the Eternal City.

One of the most charming portions of *Corinne* — all the more so in that it is unstudied — is the conversational wit so often introduced by the Count d'Erfeuil, and pervading the reflections on French society. Mme. de Staël ridicules that society, and the excessive levity of its tone, but at such times she has more of it than she suspects; and, as often happens, she disdains what are perhaps her best sayings.

As in *Delphine*, we have portraits. Mme. d'Arbigny, the calculating Frenchwoman and universal manager, is one of them. Like Mme. de Vernon, she was identified in private whispers, and people also knew of what slightly incongruous elements the noble figure of Oswald was composed, while they believed in the perfect veracity of the parting scene, and well nigh remembered Corinne's anguish during her lover's absence.

But though *Corinne* abounds in conversations and pictures of society, Mme. de Staël cannot be accused of any lack of strength and consistency of style in this book, nor of haste in the arrangement of her thoughts. As regards the general execution of the work, she has entirely laid aside her conversational brilliancy and habit of written impersonation, as indeed she sometimes did when standing (*stans pede in uno*) and leaning against an angle of the chimney. If there are still imperfections of form, they are rare accidents. I have seen noted in pencil in a copy of *Corinne* a prodigious number of *buts*, which give an air of monotony to the earlier pages. But on the whole a watchful care presides over the details of this monument of her powers.

The writer has attained to art, sustained dignity, and rhythm.¹

The work on Germany, which did not appear until 1813, in London, was on the eve of publication in Paris in 1810. The edition which had been submitted to the imperial censors, Esmenard and others, was complete, when the police tacked suddenly, the sheets were sent to the pasteboard-maker, and the whole thing was annihilated. The letter of the Duke de Rovigo, and the remainder of the shameful history, are well known. Germany having now become better known than formerly, and having besides progressed since that period, Mme. de Staël's book may seem to us of to-day incomplete in its historic portions. Public opinion has shown of late a growing sense of its defects. But aside from the honor of having made a beginning, of which no one else was then capable, and where Villers alone (pro-

¹ On the occasion of a reprint of *Corinne* in 1839, we commented as follows: "As time progresses, the interest attaching to books once recognized as durable may vary, but it cannot diminish. Their very faults become touches which are not without their charm, as the once admired expression of a taste already superseded by some other, which in its own turn will pass away. Something has died out of that which continues to live, and a tinge of sadness is fitting in the midst of our admiration. It will be yet more so now that the memory of a recent death is associated with the immortal image of *Corinne*, — when we cannot speak of Mme. de Staël without a thought of what the grave has just snatched away. This book, which the death of her father sent her to Italy to ponder, is scarcely thirty years old, but it has seen herself, her son and her daughter, committed to the earth. It should be re-read in the presence of these solemn thoughts of mortality; for if it does not state the real mystery of life, its influence is at least thoroughly generous, noble, and good."

vided. he had had as much talent for writing as for conversation) could have competed with her, I do not think there is to be found elsewhere any vivid picture of the birth of German genius, of that brilliant age of poetry which may be called the age of Göthe, since German poetry of a high order would almost seem to have been born and died with that great man. It lived but a single patriarchal life, and all since has been decomposition and decay. In her view of Germany, Mme. de Staël laid great stress upon the subject of philosophy, and on an order of ideas differing from those of the French idealogists, although in so doing she found herself sufficiently far removed from the doctrines of her own youth. And here we must not fail to note the revelation of a growing care for the moral tone of her writings. No work appears to her sufficiently moral which does not help to perfect the soul in some direction. In the admirable discourse on Jean Jacques, which she attributes to a religious recluse, the proposition is laid down that "the true use of genius is to manifest supreme goodness." In more than one passage she appears earnestly combating the idea of suicide. "When we are very young," she strikingly says, "while as yet life has not begun to deteriorate, the tomb seems but a poetic image of slumber, amid the kneeling figures of those who weep for us. By the time we have reached middle life it is no longer so, and we come to understand why it is that religion, the science of the soul, should attach the horror of murder to the idea of self-destruction." Even at this sad period of her life, Mme. de Staël did not abjure enthusiasm. Her book ends with the praise thereof, but she was striving to reduce it to order in the presence of God.

The Essay on Suicide, which appeared in Sweden in 1812, was composed after 1810, and reveals, with increased clearness, the signs of the moral revolution in Mme. de Staël's being.

The bitterness caused by the unexpected suppression of her book was great. Six years of study and of hope destroyed, persecution redoubled at the moment when she had reason to expect a truce, and other painful and adverse circumstances, helped to make this period of her life a season of sharp crisis and decisive test, which introduced her irretrievably into what I have called her *sombre* years. Away! Away! For all her enduring fame, she will stand and sing upon the capitol no more. Hitherto even her storms had cleared off brightly, with sweet reflected lights and an evanescent beauty. They had mingled — to use her own charming expression — something of the *Scotch air* in the music of her life. But henceforth the world becomes sterner. Youth, that grand and ready consoler, flies first. Mme. de Staël shrank with horror from old age and the thought of reaching it. One day, when she had been confessing this feeling to Mme. Suard, the latter remarked, "After all, you will play your part, and be a very lovable old woman." But she shuddered at the idea. The word *youth* had the charm of music for her ear. She liked to end her sentences with it, and the simple words, "We were young then," would fill her eyes with tears. "Do we not often," she wrote in her Essay on Suicide, "see renewed the spectacle of Mezentius' torture in the union of those inseparable foes, — a living soul and a decayed body? What is the mission of that sad avant-courier that nature causes to precede death, if not to order us to

exist without happiness, resigning daily, flower by flower, the crown of life?" She plunged as far back as possible into the past — far from "those late days, which repeat in tones so hollow the brilliant strains of our first." The sentiment which she was then exciting in M. Rocca kept up for her some slight illusion of youth. She allowed herself to search the magic mirror of two young dazzled eyes, and there read a denial of the extreme ravages she had sustained. But her marriage with M. Rocca, shattered by his wounds, the grateful devotion which she vowed to him, her own failing health, — these things induced a greater regularity in the performance of her religious duties. The "Scotch air" — the brilliant strain of early days — soon became a hymn, solemn, sanctifying, austere. Religion must now penetrate below her words, and affect her actual practice. When she was younger and less borne down, it had been enough for her to go, in her hours of sadness, and visit her father's tomb on the other side of the park, or to converse with Benjamin Constant or M. de Montmorency, in a strain of high-flown mysticism. But in advanced life, when the elasticity whereby we resist positive and increasing suffering is once destroyed, when all things fail and fade and wither day by day, transient inspirations afford us no support. We need a firmer and more continually present faith. Mme. de Staël sought it where alone she could have found it, — in the gospel, — in the heart of the Christian religion. The sharpest crisis which she encountered before she became quite resigned, was during the long year that preceded her flight. The active constancy of some of her friends who were struck down for her sake, the description, the pitiful excuses, the *alarm disguised as an*

affection of the chest, of others, had smitten her heart with manifold melancholy. She beheld herself surrounded by an atmosphere of fatal contagion, which she communicated to those whom she loved best, while her own head was above danger. "I am the Orestes of exile," she cried in private to those who were sacrificing themselves for her; and again, "It seems to me that I am like the tower of Ugolino." Too much shut up at Coppet, and especially to her own terrible imaginings, she desired at all hazards to regain free air and a vast space. The prefect of Geneva, M. Capelle, who had succeeded on the recall of M. Barante *père*, suggested that she should write something about the King of Rome. A word of this kind would have smoothed all paths and opened all capitals to her. She repudiated the idea at once, and replied, with her own unfailing promptitude of repartee, that she desired nothing for the child but a good nurse. The *Ten Years of Exile* describes to the life the vicissitudes of this situation. She represents herself as studying unceasingly the map of Europe, as if it were the plan of a vast prison, whence she was determined to escape. All her desires tended towards England; but she was destined to go thither by way of St. Petersburg.

In this long-cherished frame of mind, after her struggles had issued in a genuine ripeness of character, the Restoration found Mme. de Staël and brought her home. She had seen Louis XVIII. in England. "We shall have a king very friendly to literature," she said at that time to a friend. She felt drawn towards this prince, whose moderate opinions recalled some of her father's. She became entirely converted to English political ideas in that England which seemed to her, *par excellence*,

the land of family life and public liberty. On her return we find her calmer, wiser, — full, no doubt, of generous impetuosity, until her latest hour, but fixed in those semi-aristocratic opinions which from 1795 to 1802 she had by no means professed. Her hostility to the empire, her absence from France, her familiarity with the allied sovereigns and with foreign society, the extreme weariness of spirit which caused her to return in thought to gentler impressions, — all these things helped to bring about the metamorphosis in her. Mme. de Staël, as she grew older, was destined heartily to accept her father's old-fashioned ideas. As it has been remarked, that, with the advent of old age, our temperaments revert to the original type which they displayed in infancy, divesting themselves by degrees of the variations in form which they had contracted in the interval; as revolutions, after their first outburst, recede to a point short of that which they were at first supposed to have attained, or which they had overpassed, — so we see Mme. de Staël, towards the close of her life, taking refuge in a more mixed and temperate, and for her almost home-like, system. For the daughter of M. Necker to accept in full the Charter of Louis XVIII. was simply to return to Saint Ouen.

The Considerations on the French Revolution, the last work of Mme. de Staël, — that which has sealed the judgment of posterity, and in political matters ranges her name where it naturally belongs — between the honored names of her father and her son-in-law, — reveals her far more clearly under her liberal, softened English, and, as they say, slightly *doctrinary*, aspect, than we ourselves could do. Soon after her return to France, she beheld the development of party exigencies, and

of all the difficulties by which restorations are complicated. Concession, conciliatory and prudent measures, — such was the policy which, from the very outset, she indicated and advised. Her intimacy with Mme. de Duras and M. de Chateaubriand sprang from a desire to make friends with the most enlightened and liberal of those whose loyalty was warmer than her own. “The system pursued,” she wrote in 1816, “is entirely opposed to my own; but my affection for those pursuing it is perfectly sincere.” Henceforth she had to suffer incessantly, in her private relations and affections, from marked differences of opinion with her friends. The sheaf of human friendships was loosened and unbound about her, and a few new and precious acquisitions, like Sir James Mackintosh, indemnified her but imperfectly for her losses. Painful are the days, albeit they come sooner or later in every life, when we see our chosen ones, whom we had grouped with a sort of artistic care in the arms of our single love, cooling, becoming offended, darkening towards us, one by one, the once bright bloom of their affection somehow soiled. These defections, to which the fondest attachment opposes no obstacle, moved Mme. de Staël peculiarly, and weaned her, if not from life, at least from its vanities and perishable joys. Even the pleasure of writing to M. Montmorency, her *admirable friend*, was at length marred, owing to the unhappy differences on which he himself too strongly insisted. M. von Schlegel was deeply aggrieved by the encroachments of politics, and appeared ill at ease, and sometimes bitter, in those unquiet circles which no longer represented for him the noble literary life of Coppet. Sensible of these things, and already stricken by increasing illness, M. de Staël fled for refuge

to her family, or, looking higher, to the fidelity of Him who can never fail us. Yet she died surrounded by all those choice spirits whose names we love to associate with her own. It was in Paris, in 1817, on the 14th of July, — day of freedom and sunshine, — that she breathed her last, with organs prematurely decayed, but full of genius and tenderness. Only the evening before, she had been wheeled into the garden in her arm-chair, and had distributed roses and pious words as souvenirs among the noble friends she was leaving.

The posthumous publication of the *Considerations*, which took place in 1818, was a marked event, and constituted a public and imposing funeral service for Mme. de Staël. In it she proposed a political interpretation, both of the Revolution and the Restoration, destined to be long heard of among men, and to exercise a lasting influence. It was a constitutional monarchy of her own devising. Aside from this, and from the scheme of M. de Chateaubriand, no great security was possible for the Restoration; and oscillation between the two extremes above mentioned might have been indefinitely prolonged.

Each party, while the enthusiasm of novelty lasted, sought eagerly in the *Considerations* for weapons wherewith to defend its own cause. The eulogiums upon it were just, the attacks passionate. Benjamin Constant in the *Minerve*, M. de Fitz James in the *Conservateur*, commented upon it sharply, and, as may be imagined, from entirely opposite stand-points. M. Bailleul and M. de Bonald published mutually hostile pamphlets on the subject, and there were others. A direct intellectual influence was exercised by this work of Mme. de Staël's over the young, liberal, philosophical clique,

and over that whose shade of opinion was afterwards represented by the *Globe*. The political party, which, so to speak, emanated from her, and to which she would have adhered if she had lived, has missed in more than one instance the genial, conciliatory, irresistible influence which her presence would have exercised.

But it is in the domain of art, as I conceive, that her action would have been peculiarly and increasingly noble, effectual, cordial, and intelligent, unremitting in its encouragement of rising talent, whose possessors she would have moulded and polished with pleasure and profit to themselves. Amid all the scattered and independent lights of to-day, she, perhaps, would have been the link, the communicable and rekindling flame. In her presence they would have learned to comprehend one another; they would have perfected themselves by adding art to thought. O, if Mme. de Staël had but lived, appreciative and sincerely affectionate as she was, how she would have labored with that gifted woman¹ whom I will not again contrast with her, as, emulating the severity of a false world and its false moralists, I have sometimes done! How she would have hurried to her side in person after the appearance of *Lélia*, indulgent, but filled with fond alarm! Delphine, alone, of all the women in the drawing-room seated herself beside Mme. R——. In lieu of making hackneyed inquiries, or bestowing malicious praise, how she would have pressed to her heart that genius, more artistic than herself, it may be, but thus far less philosophic, less wise, less trustful, less remarkable for sound and sagacious political opinions! How elo-

¹ George Sand.

quently she would have spoken to her of the mercy of Heaven, of that "beauty which pervades the universe, not to mock at man, but to prophesy to him of better days"! How she would have welcomed and encouraged her more serene inspirations! O woman whom the unanimous voice of public opinion already proclaims the first in literature since Mme. de Staël, there mingles, I am sure, in your admiration of her, something of deep and tender gratitude for the good she would have desired for you, and might have accomplished! There is a last link which unites your glory with her own!¹

May, 1835.

¹ "I felt authorized to speak thus by the personal testimony, by the very words, in fact, of the celebrated author whom I here invoke. Since then this author has seen fit to sever the link alluded to by launching at Mme. de Staël one of those diatribes, more reprehensible, if possible, from the pen of a woman than from that of a man. Such things, however much talent they display, suffice to indicate the differences of nature and inspiration between these two. Here, as has too often happened in my critical career, I had trusted to a warning, — a hopeful aspiration, — a desire."

VI.

MADAME DE DURAS.

THE Restoration, although comprising, in its fifteen years' course, so brief a period and so narrow a space, presents to view certain incidents, certain groups of opinions and of individuals, and certain isolated figures, which appear to great advantage under the conditions of that time, and which, while we do not in the least adopt their style, we are frequently surprised to find ourselves regretting, as we regret all that is rare and brilliant, harmonious and transitory. More than once we have had occasion to point out under what auspicious circumstances, and by what a combination of diverse sentiments, that school of poetry and art arose, which was the natural fruit of the last years of the Restoration, and which, in respect of its origin merely, and entirely apart from the works which its scattered celebrities may yet produce, will ever be held in honor. In the several departments of history, philosophy, and criticism, there were also formations essential to this era, deriving from it their means of progress, growth, and culture. Our present intention is merely to speak of that element in the world of mind which was not hostile to the principles of the Restoration,—never opposing it either by open attack or secret strategy,—but which attempted to modify the order of which it was

itself an outgrowth, and might have proved its strength and its adornment, if that order had not made haste, one fine morning, to fire its own magazine. In the realm of high society, this intellectual movement, so fruitful even then and so flattering in its promise, had its centre and focus in two or three so called *doctrinary salons*. The prevailing tone of these *coteries* was at all events serious,—the ordinary tone of debate, of protracted, sustained, political or literary discussion, with psychological asides. In them conversation savored of learning and amusement of instruction. This picture, however, would need to be considerably toned down, if the doctrinary zone were supposed to extend from M. Royer Collard, through the *salons* of MM. Guizot, de Broglie, and Barante, to M. de Sainte-Aulaire. But in the fashionable world, and on the surface of the society which it patronized, the Restoration was destined to introduce other combinations more complex still. Between the studious, argumentative, doctrinary circles,—noble in themselves, indeed, but especially distinguished by their fruits,—and the purely aristocratic and frivolous circles, there was a strongly-marked interval, an obstinate and utter divorce; new lights and modern ideas on the one hand, and the charm of antiquity on the other, separated by a spirit of pretension and mutual *hauteur*. Yet here, precisely, was reconciliation to be conceived and attempted. As from the midst of the royalist ranks there issued, at intervals, an eloquent voice, inviting legitimacy and liberty to a chivalrous alliance, and invoking, in the realm of politics, the ideal of a constitutional monarchy, so simultaneously and with greater success, there appeared in the most select circle of society a rare woman, who quietly effected, in

her own vicinity, a marvellous compromise between the new authorities and the tone and tastes of other days. The *salon* of Mme. de Duras, her personal ascendancy and everything connected therewith, illustrate, in the clearest possible manner, the era of the Restoration, — illustrate it by an aspect of lingering exclusiveness and partial condescension, a compound of aristocracy and affability, grave, but never dull, brilliant and witty, but on no account vulgar, semi-liberal and insensibly progressive, — by that system of illusions and concessions, which, though elsewhere attended by struggle and effort, produced here only a general impression of grace. It was a natural product of the Restoration; like one of those flowery islets, formed temporarily upon the surface of a lake, where contrary currents meet without too great a shock. The whole slightly artificial structure of those fifteen years has been compared to a kind of Saint-Germain terrace, having its base washed by that popular surge which ultimately destroyed it. And on that terrace there was a nook — not its least attractive for shade and prospect — worthy to preserve the name of Mme. de Duras, and sure to find mention in any detailed history of the time. No doubt the influence of this *salon* was slight, immediate, and temporary; and though rendered positive by M. de Chateaubriand, who was in some sort its political representative, it still accomplished less, and left upon posterity very much slighter traces, than, for instance, the doctrinary *salons* to which we have alluded, and which constituted a centre of instruction and a school. The general effect of society here was rather, despite the freshness of its splendor, that of a last tender reminiscence, a reflex of the past amid the present hopes of

the Restoration, — a parting glow dependent upon a thousand circumstances of cloud and sun, never to be reproduced. There were few, besides Mme. de Duras, who could have brought to her difficult position the necessary qualifications, — the state and influence of the Duke de Duras, his deference to herself, her own simple and refined mind, the generosity which predisposed her in favor of all merit; even that liberty-loving blood of Kersaint which flowed in her veins, and, at certain moments, irresistibly dyed her brow, — and all reduced to the same mild and conciliatory tone by the supreme authority of fashion.

It would betray a very imperfect knowledge of Mme. de Duras to pronounce her merely a woman of refined mind, and delicate, sensitive soul, — as might be supposed from the mollifying influence which she exercised in the world, and from a cursory perusal of her charming publications. She was stronger, grander, endowed with a larger capacity for passion, than would appear at first sight. There were mighty springs and a noble unrest in this nature, ready to be engrossed by all genuine affections and all serious issues. Like the epoch which it was her mission to represent and adorn, she concealed beneath a brilliant and finely-toned exterior more than one struggle, more than one storm.

The Duchess de Duras was born at Brest, about ten years before the outbreak of the Revolution. Her father, Count de Kersaint, was one of the most skilful of seamen up to the time when the Revolution made of him an illustrious citizen and a martyr. At the age of seven, little Clara was admitted to familiar intercourse with her parents. Mme. de Duras herself says that she had no childhood, having been, from the first,

rational and serious. Her affections found full employment at the domestic hearth, until the Revolution came to introduce new and distracting emotions. We can imagine with what impassioned interest this young spirit followed from afar her father's efforts and his danger. The grief occasioned by the death of Louis XVI. was the first blow given to her deep sensibility. That of Kersaint¹ speedily followed. Flight from France having become necessary, Mlle. de Kersaint embarked for America in company with her mother, whose health had been shattered and her mind impaired by all her misfortunes. She went first to Philadelphia, and afterwards to Martinique, where she managed her mother's property with a prudence and authority far beyond her years. Suddenly left an orphan and a great heiress, notwithstanding the European confiscations, she repaired to England, where she married the Duke de Duras. Memories of that emigration, her stay in England, and the death of the king, formed the background of her life. She loved to revert to these things and to describe them. M. de Chateaubriand, in his unpublished Memoirs, after

¹ Kersaint bore a great and intrepid part in the Convention. Ever in the breach, ready to protest against iniquity, defend the innocent, or accuse to their faces sanguinary men, he deserved to have his conduct become a kind of model for this species of political action. Opposed to the men who, no longer approving of a Revolution, and unwilling to accept anything from an Assembly, stood aside, withdrew, more or less of them, and even emigrated to some extent, there were those who remained upon the spot, testifying aloud, disputing every step, and dying when their time came with words of warning upon their lips. As an offset to the system of emigration, we have the system personified by Kersaint, which might well be called by his name.

a vivid picture of this period of the English emigration, and of the different people whom he then met, adds, "The Duchess de Duras must certainly have been a bride in London at this time, but I was not to know her for years. How often do we unconsciously pass that by which might have constituted our life's greatest joy, as the sailor clears the waters of some blessed country which is removed from him but one horizon, — but one day's sail!"¹

Returning to France, during the consulate, with her two daughters, — the only children she ever had, — she found in them an absorbing care and an object of tender interest. She remained isolated under the empire, never appearing at court, but living for the most part in a retired castle in Touraine,² where she devoted herself to the education of her girls, charity to her neighbors, and domestic life. She had so little self-consciousness, that it seems as if she might easily have remained forever ignorant of her own power. She was singularly capable of adapting herself to different persons and circumstances, and that naturally, without apparent effort or definite intent. She was very simple with the simple, and commonplace with the insignificant, not because she despised them, but because, under such circumstances, it did not occur

¹ During her stay in England, did not the young Duchess de Duras have to overcome certain prejudices of the emigrant world, on the score of her birth, — noble, yet so intimately connected with the Revolution? Did she not at times have painful experience of that feeling of being out of place, that sense of discord, which, under different aspects, seems often to have occupied her thoughts, and which, in her touching productions, she has transferred to a different kind of inequality?

² The Chateau d'Ussé, on the Loire.

to her to be brilliant. She used to tell how people often said of her, when she was quite young, "Clara is a very good girl, but 'tis a pity she has so little mind." Absence of pretension was her most distinctive trait. She did not at that time think of authorship. The books she read—scientific or other—were good of their kind, but few. She was familiar with the English poets, and dreamed over some of their verses. Thus uniting the culture of her intellect to a most systematic care of her house and family, she maintained that the two were mutually helpful; that you came from the one class of occupations better prepared for the other; and even went so far as jestingly to declare, that a knowledge of Latin was useful in making sweetmeats. The most noble and illustrious friendships were, however, growing up around her. M. de Chateaubriand devoted hours to her, and many of the great pages of the future were written by her at his dictation. From this time forward she seems also to have kept a correspondence with Mme. de Staël, and their friendly relations were destined to become yet closer at the subsequent period of the illustrious exile's return. Even those who have merely seen their portraits cannot have failed to remark the strong resemblance, if only in the black eyes and style of *coiffure*, between these two women, whose works are so dissimilar. But that which they especially had in common, and which makes the author of *Edouard* at heart own sister to the author of *Delphine*, was fervor of spirit, strength of feeling, a capacity for generous indignation and self-devotion.

If I dared risk the effect of the contrast, I would mention, as a similar term, one other name,—a Giron-

dist name, also, but thoroughly plebeian, — that of Mme. Roland. In these household cares and this domestic simplicity, alternating with the exercises of an elevated thought, who can fail to discover the germ of a resemblance? Other points of sympathy between these two might possibly be detected beneath the differences of education and fortune. The mind of Mme. de Duras was certainly more delicate, less masculine, and, it may be, less broad than that of Kersaint's¹ companion on the scaffold, but she yields to her in no other quality of heart or intellect.

In 1813 Mme. de Duras was induced to return to Paris and establish herself more permanently than heretofore, by the marriage of her eldest daughter — a marriage which engrossed many of her thoughts, for she was enthusiastic even in her maternal devotion.

The Restoration caused her great joy, but she had her own ideas concerning it, and she was ere long to suffer keenly on its behalf, as we suffer for the loved and lost. Her circle of friends, however, — thanks to her more constant residence in Paris, — was all the time being enlarged and enriched. Not to mention the mere aristocrats and diplomats, nor M. de Chateaubriand, who was seldom seen in the evening, it numbered MM. de Humboldt, Cuvier, Abel Rémusat, Molé, de Montmorency, de Villèle, and de Barante. Towards M. de Villemain she felt herself drawn, no less by his marvellous talent for conversation, than by her sympa-

¹ Mme. Roland passes a severe judgment upon Kersaint in her Memoirs. He had certain of the fastidious habits of a gentleman, and these she did not like. But we, their posterity, love to associate their generous names, consecrated by a common martyrdom.

thy with his moderate political opinions, which represented the nearest approach to liberalism possible to herself. M. de Talleyrand found in her *salon* a rejuvenated image of the circles of the Maréchale de Luxembourg and the Maréchale de Beauvau; but he used gracefully to complain of a certain want of maturity, and say that it would be necessary to wait fifteen years before the resemblance would be complete. Amid this extreme of outward worldly splendor, the health of Mme. de Duras was failing for several years before she altered her manner of life; but, in 1820, or thereabouts, she was obliged almost entirely to give up going out. Her soul retained its freshness of sensibility, its unfailing purity of passion. Her steadfast ardor only increased in view of disease and suffering. She resolved to bear these things; she accepted them; she loved them. But we shall presently revert to this fine side of her character.

Thus far we find no traces, in the life of Mme. de Duras, of any literary effort or intention of authorship. It was, in fact, by chance that she became an author. As late as 1820 she had, one evening, been telling, at some length, the true story of a young negress who had been brought up by the Maréchale de Beauvau, and her friends, fascinated by the narrative, — for she was an excellent story-teller, — asked her why she did not write out the history. The next morning the novel was half written. *Edouard* followed almost immediately; then two or three other short romances, that have never been published, but which will, we trust, appear at no distant day. Thus, by describing the sufferings of the soul, she strove to distract her attention from those of the body, shedding over every tender page she penned

a reflection from those high consolations, towards which, in her secret heart, she was turning more and more each day.

The prevailing idea of *Ourika* and *Edouard*, and probably, also, of the other works of Mme. de Duras, is the idea of inequality either of nature or social position, — of obstacle or impediment between the heart's desire and its mortal object; of some painful want, creating a kind of famine for tenderness, — the color and deformity of *Ourika*, the birth of *Edouard*. Yet, in these victims of a devouring jealousy, generosity always triumphs. The author of these affecting tales loves to represent the unattainable, — to cause the hearts of her favorites, of the darlings of her own creation, to break for what cannot be. Only at the last does heaven open, and shed some drops of refreshing dew. While in the outer world Mme. de Duras never failed to wear an air of courteous concession, and readily yielded opinions, here in her writings she was fond of describing a sad and heart-rending antagonism. For all was struggle, suffering, desire, and disappointment, in the depths of this noble soul, ardent as the tropical climes in which her youth ripened, stormy as the seas furrowed by Kersaint. She was one of those who have infinite instincts, strong and impulsive yearnings; who are always asking of earth what it cannot give them; and who, in the frankness of their extravagant desires, strive, as the Abbé Prévost somewhere says, with a marvellous fervor of feeling, for objects whose attainment is doubtful; who aspire to the bliss of loving without stint or limit; in whom grief always finds an easy prey; one of those wounded spirits that fling themselves unceasingly against the narrow bars of their fleshly prison.

The romances of *Ourika* and *Edouard* are, in our opinion, merely a delicate and reserved expression, — a picture softened and modified for the eyes of the world, — of that mysterious leaven of unrest always working in the breast of Mme. de Duras. *Ourika*, brought from Senegal, as Mlle. Aïssé was brought from Constantinople, received, as had the young Circassian, in her day, a finished education, but, less fortunate than she, she was not white. So, while Mlle. Aïssé, beloved by the Chevalier d'Aydie, refuses to marry him because she will not disgrace him, thus playing a part somewhat like *Edouard's*, poor *Ourika*, despised by Charles, who believes only in friendship, becomes the prey of a slow, consuming passion, whereof she herself remains unconscious until too late. Nothing can be more natural than the deep-seated and morbid feeling about her color, once betrayed by *Ourika*. "I had removed all the mirrors from my chamber; I always wore gloves; my dress concealed my neck and arms. I wore, whenever I went out, a large hat and a veil, which I often kept on in the house. Alas! I did but deceive myself. I closed my eyes as children do, and fancied I could not be seen." The *salon* of the Maréchale de Beauvau is ravishingly described by the heir-ess of its style and traditions. The scenes of the Terror are faithfully portrayed. Inequality of rank, unguessed passion, the constraints of society, the alternative of emigration or the guillotine, — all the favorite ideas of Mme. de Duras, — are here; the principal points of the circle are touched. And when *Ourika* has become a Gray Sister in a convent, and when, having chanced suddenly and inadvertently to quote *Galatæa*, she exclaims, — speaking of the image which

so inveterately pursued her,—"It was that of the chimeras by which I had allowed myself to be beset. Thou hadst not then taught me, O my God, to exorcise these phantoms. I knew not that there is no rest save in Thee,"—when we find the narrative interrupted by this simple outburst, we feel that the author has betrayed herself, and stands self-confounded; that she has put her own thought into the mouth of this martyr.

Edouard is a more elaborate work than *Ourika*, and constitutes Mme. de Duras' principal title to literary distinction. The scene is laid at about the same period as that of *Eugène de Rothelin*; the characters are equally simple and pure; the society perfectly elegant; the type of lovers the most graceful ever conceived. But here we have no longer, as in Mme. de Souza's charming production, an ideal of conduct and of happiness, and, as I believe I have elsewhere said, a sort of miniature *Saintré* or *Galaor* of the eighteenth century. Here are suffering and discord. The sense of social inequality is introduced. There is a trace of it in *Eugène*, also, where the hero is at first smitten by Agathe, the daughter of his good nurse. But conventionalism soon interferes triumphantly, and the happiness of all requires that it should be so. In *Edouard*, the case is different—grave and distressing. The young plebeian appears before the noble and modest Nathalie, with all the charm of his shyness, his solid attainments, his virgin sensibility, his manly brow not incapable of a blush. He is just what Hoche or Barnave will be, in the course of a few years. In *Edouard* we see two centuries, two orders of society, at war. The sorrow by which the lovers are smitten is the

presage of a new era. It is curious to note the different effects produced by the same social catastrophes, as reflected in the writings of Mme. de Souza and Mme. de Duras. The first husband of the former and the father of the latter died upon the scaffold. Both were obliged to emigrate. But the ideas of one of these distinguished persons were, so to speak, formed, and her impressions for the most part received. When she came to describe the emigration and its sorrows, she did so from the point of the old social *régime*. *Adèle de Sénange* was composed before the Revolution, and appeared in '93; but the tales that succeeded are not noticeably unlike it in tone. They are shadowed by no sad funereal tint. Eugène and Athanaïs smile at happiness as if the Revolution were not to seize them in the course of a few years. All the tales of Mme. de Souza, except *Eugénie et Mathilde*, belong to the eighteenth century, as viewed from the Empire. The novels of Mme. de Duras, are wholly of the Restoration. They contain the echo of a conflict not yet ended,—a suggestion of great catastrophes to come. One of her favorite ideas was, that the youth of those who were young during the Reign of Terror was blasted; that they had no proper youth, but would carry to the grave the traces of their early sorrows. This malady, which dates from the Terror, but which many other causes combined to induce, and which has been transmitted to all the subsequent generations,—this malady of Delphine and René,—she, too, suffers from it: she describes it minutely; she studies its varieties; she tries to find a cure for it in God. Her manner of introducing priests and convents marks, in the most trenchant manner, the difference between herself and Mme. de

Souza. They are, as it were, divided, at this point, by the whole of the religious movement which produced the Genius of Christianity and the Meditations. The convent to Mme. de Duras is a genuine cloister, rigid, austere, expiatory. The priest reappears as a veritable confessor, "an old sailor," to quote Ourika, "acquainted with the tempests of the soul."

An analysis of *Edouard* would be in very poor taste, and we shall not attempt it. We may not take anything away from so complete a fabric, nor can it be embellished by our admiration. If it be true that there are a few books which tender and unoccupied hearts love to re-read once a year, — love to have flower periodically in the memory, like the lilacs and the hawthorn, — *Edouard* is assuredly one of them. Among all the scenes so admirably grouped and connected, the principal, central, and most striking of all, — the one where, on a summer evening, at Faverange, Edouard, while discussing the price of flour, perceives Mme. de Nevers on the balcony, her figure veiled by a mist of jessamine, her profile relieved against the blue sky; that scene where the flowers are presented and returned; that scene of stifled tears and chaste confession, — realizes a youthful dream, which is reproduced in each successive generation. Nothing is wanting. Here are the choice surroundings which every young man imagines and invokes for his first declaration. Sentiment, delineation, language, all conspire to make up a page, sure to be adopted into countless romantic imaginations; a page which, had it appeared in the days of the *Princesse de Clèves*, when literature was less encumbered, could not have failed of immortality.

The style of Mme. de Duras, who attempted writing

so late in life, and with no special preparation, is never either vague or careless. It is natural, but finished; simple, rapid, and yet reserved; — a style somewhat like Voltaire's, but feminine; no artifices, especially in *Edouard*; unflinching tact, at least in the choice of background and scenery; color enough, and that positive; finally, outlines of the purest; everywhere a passion stronger than the words in which it is expressed, and no more trace of transport or extravagance than we meet in polite conversation.

While Mme. de Duras was devoting her mornings to the composition of these graceful tales, — whose smooth rind conceals a bitter sap, — she continued, notwithstanding the steady failure of her health, to receive and fascinate the world about her. Through her friendships and her powerful influence, she even bore, we suspect, a tolerably active part in the politics of her day. During the Congress of Verona, Chateaubriand wrote to her almost daily of what was transpiring, and the particulars of that mighty game. But at the same time, in the secret depths of her being, she was making a great struggle for religious submission and a pious temper. She had never been what is ordinarily called devout. She was led to the fountain-head by reflection, by solitary re-action, by the collective might of the sorrows that oppressed her. On the very day, in 1824, when an intimate friend surprised her in all the ardor of her opposition to M. de Villèle, holding in her hand Count Roy's pamphlet, justifiably incensed, and prophesying, by that noble faculty of indignation which the world had never corrupted, the inevitable rupture with her eloquent friend, — on that self-same day, perhaps, she had been meditating in the morning over one of those

Christian Reflections which she was then endeavoring to mature. Her instinctive political opinions betrayed her Girondist blood — a generous enthusiasm, self-devoted, self-destroying, vain. When a friend remarked to her on the occasion of one of her impulsive outbursts, that she had a right to be thus liberal, being the daughter of M. de Kersaint, she exclaimed, “O, yes! poor father! He loved liberty as it should be loved. He did not go too far in the Revolution. He would gladly have defended Louis XVI.” She made a careful distinction between liberal ideas and revolutionary ideas, abhorring the latter and adoring the former. This — added to the habit of self-repression, and the ease of a woman of high fashion apt to seize an advantage — led to her complete conformity with the softened type of the Restoration.

Nevertheless, this too frank nature could not fail of receiving wounds and shocks at a time of so much party irritation and social formality. She was spared neither envy nor hate. There was a prejudice against her, in certain fanatical circles, on account of the splendor of her *salon*, her liberal opinions, and the sort of people whom she was said to see. Her friends sometimes received odious anonymous letters. She could not be ignorant of these manœuvres, and she suffered on account of them, but strove to wean her spirit from a world where enmities are so active and where friendships are too apt to become cold and faithless. All her passions, humanly speaking, so noble; her excessive zeal, whether political or maternal; her partialities, the yearnings of a heart which aspired to clasp its loved ones too closely, — began slowly to subside into prayer and peaceful tears in the presence of her God. Her

physical sufferings became, at intervals, excruciating, intolerable; but she accepted them meekly, she applied her whole mind to endurance. She conceived for suffering — if one may venture to say so — a kind of last sublime passion. Amid the progressive decay of her organs, her heart seemed redoubling its youthful ardor, even to the end. And now, removed almost entirely from the world, encircled by the pious and perfectly unremitting care of her daughter, the Duchess de Rauzan, — sometimes at Paris, sometimes at Saint-Germain, — finally at Nice, where her death took place, in January, 1829, — she was entirely absorbed in the solemn thoughts of immortality, accompanied, however, and nourished by the cares of a watchful, practical benevolence. Her other idolized daughter, the Countess de la Rochejacquelein, hastened to Nice, and was permitted to share in the last offices of affection, and to receive her mother's parting smile.

Among the brief *Reflexions Chrétiennes* traced by her own hand, we find fragments on the Passions, on Strength, and on Leniency. In the first, the title of which is "Watch and pray," we read,¹ "Almost all our

¹ The manuscript works of Mme. de Duras were to have been — and, in accordance with her own expressed intention, certainly ought to be — published by M. Valery, whose fine taste qualified him, she thought, to appreciate them. We have felt justified, however, in giving some idea of the *Reflexions Chrétiennes*, a copy of which we have seen, since these were not to have been included in the published works. A part of the Reflections and Prayers have, at length (1839), been printed; but for some inconceivable reason the publication of the other MSS. seems to have been indefinitely postponed. The fruits of the intellect would seem to have their season, as well as those of the earth.

moral griefs, almost all those heart-rendings which desolate our lives, might have been prevented if we had *watched*; for then should we never have given entrance to those passions, which are, all of them, even the perfectly legitimate, death to the body and the soul. Watchfulness is involuntary submission." And what a profound and melancholy meaning attaches to the following simple words on the lips of Mme. de Duras: "As we advance, our illusions vanish, and, one by one, we see removed all the objects of our affection. The charm of a fresh interest, change of feeling, inconstancy, ingratitude, death, — these things depopulate by degrees the world of enchantment, whereof we made an idol in our youth. To love God is to adore, at their source, the perfections which we hoped to find in his creatures, but which we have sought in them in vain. That fragment of good which we sometimes find in man, it is in God that we must love it." Farther on she invokes the fear of God as a spur to an inert and languid temper. She prays for energy, "for," she says, "the lack of energy is one of the greatest dangers of late conversions." But we shall best give an idea of

We have retained, from a cursory perusal of these inedited works, the following thoughts: —

"There are beings from whom we feel ourselves separated, as it were, by the walls of glass described in fairy tales. We see each other, we converse, we approach, but we can never touch."

"It is with the maladies of the soul as with those of the body; the most surely fatal are those that are born with us. There are — if one may venture on the expression — chronic despairs, akin to the bodily disorders, so called. They gnaw — they consume — they destroy; but they do not confine you to your bed."

"Discord in the movements of the heart is as irritating as discord in music, and far more harmful."

her style as a Christian moralist, and of that tender subtilty which reveals the deepest workings of any feeling, by transcribing her meditation on Leniency.

LENIENCY.

“Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.”

“This word at once commands the exercise of leniency and assigns a reason for it. There are various ways of forgiving. All are good, because all are Christian; but they differ among themselves as widely as the virtues out of which they spring. One forgives that he may be forgiven; another, because he feels that he deserves to suffer, — this is the forgiveness of humility; another still, on the principle of returning good for evil; but no one of these varieties of pardon includes an excuse for the pain inflicted upon ourselves. The pardon of Jesus Christ is the true Christian pardon. ‘They know not what they do.’ In these affecting words we find the excuse of the offender and the consolation of the offended — the only consolation possible under those moral griefs where the evil done us is, so to speak, only secondary. It puts the finishing touch to sorrow to be unable to find an excuse for those we love; but here the explanation is offered: ‘They know not what they do.’ They have torn our hearts, but they knew not what they did. They were blind, their eyes were closed; our very anguish is the pledge of their innocence. The human heart is pitiful. Great wrongs can only come of great darkness. Is it conceivable that one should inflict, voluntarily and in cold blood, those excruciating pangs which cause us to die a thousand deaths before our time? Is it con-

ceivable that you should be willing to break a heart that has cherished, adored, defended you for years? For it is the nature of ingratitude — the source of our heaviest sorrows — to despise the tenderness bestowed upon it because incapable of returning it in kind. But in this very incapacity, in this very ignorance, lies the exculpation. To lavish affection on those who cannot return it, is like trying to give sight to the blind, hearing to the deaf. Forgive them, O my God, for they know not what they do. Forgive them without their having to reproach themselves, without accounting their pardon a virtue in me, for it is but just. But take pity on me, and teach me to love thee only, and give me rest! Amen."

There is nothing to be added to words like these. But the different degrees of Christian pardon, — the first where one forgives that he may be forgiven; that is, from motives of hope or fear: the second, where one forgives because he knows that he deserves to suffer; that is, from motives of humility: and, finally, the case where one forgives out of regard to the command to return good for evil; that is, from obedience, — all these modes of pardon, which still fall short of the forgiveness that is thoroughly noble and disinterested, remind me of what we read in the Fathers of the Desert, as translated by Arnould d'Andilly. "I once saw," says an Abbé of Sinai, "three solitaries who had received the same injury. The first was troubled and indignant; but still, because he feared divine justice, he held his peace." The second rejoiced on his own account at the evil treatment he had received, because he hoped to be compensated therefor, but was sorry for him who had committed the outrage. The third,

thinking only of his neighbor's sin, was so moved by it — for he truly loved him, — that he wept freely. Thus may we see, in these three servants of God, the working of three different motives; in one, the fear of punishment; in another, the hope of reward; in the last, the unselfish tenderness of a perfect love." And is it not wonderful to observe how, through all the ages, the Christian spirit maintains its integrity in those who possess it, conducting to well nigh the same moral solutions and discriminations the aged Abbé of the Sinaitic convent and the great lady of our own day?

Such was the consummation of one of the most brilliant, complete, and appropriately diversified lives that can possibly be imagined — a life which reconciled the Restoration and the old *régime*; to which high birth, genius, and generosity imparted their charm; a life impassioned and yet pure, with a noble Christian end, such as we find in the records of the illustrious women of the seventeenth century, — an harmonious reflex of the finely-gifted lives and pious deaths characteristic of that era, — but deriving from the storms of the present a new impress, which gives a unique value to the whole.

July, 1834.

Among the many persons whom it has been needful to consult, in the preparation of this notice, and from whom our own impressions and opinions have been derived, it is impossible not to particularize M. Villemain.

VII.

MADAME DE REMUSAT.

I HAVE always had a great fancy for unsuspected authors. We meet them in society, we enjoy their wit, we display our own in their presence, but without the remotest suspicion that we are associating with a writer, a man or woman of letters, none of our acquaintances, in fact, having less of that air. But there comes a time, — a summer in the country, — a season of ennui, when, life's brilliant years being over, the individual, generally the woman in question, takes up the pen. For her own behoof solely, and at first without definite aim, she composes a romance, or arranges her reminiscences, or even merely writes to her absent friends letters which are a trifle long, and none too formal. But fifty years hence, when the rest of us are all dead, when the professional *littérateur* who was the rage in his day no longer finds readers, and his thirty heavy, old-fashioned volumes lie buried in funereal catalogues, the modest, intelligent woman will be studied and enjoyed almost as much as by us her contemporaries. Her pure and vivacious utterances will be known and loved, and she will have become one of the gracious and enduring ornaments of that literature where-with she seemed to concern herself as little as did we when at her side.

Examples of this sort of literary fate have not been unfrequent in the past, and the future, we must hope, holds a few of them in reserve. All things are not henceforth to be done professionally and deliberately, and the turn of unpremeditated efforts will come. In the refined and exclusive lineage of the de Sévigné and the de Motteville, Mme. de Rémusat will hold a prominent place, especially after her *Memoirs of the Empire* shall have been given to the world. Meanwhile we may be permitted to claim for her the authorship of an excellent *Essay on the Education of Women*, which has recently been reprinted. We shall not, however, confine ourselves to the book. The individual will attract us far more powerfully, and we shall hold it an honor and a privilege to make our readers intimately acquainted with this noble-minded woman. Some of them remember her well; others have barely heard of her. Ours is the thorough knowledge which springs from long and confidential friendship. To describe her worthily and minutely would seem to many, no doubt, the natural and easy task of another writer, as fastidious as he is earnest; but filial modesty is the most delicate of all sentiments.

Claire Elizabeth Gravier de Vergennes was born at Paris in the year 1780. She was grand-niece to that minister of Louis XVI. who bore the same name. Her father, who held the office of master of requests had been intendant at Auch, and occupied in Paris, on the outbreak of the Revolution, an important post, amounting to a kind of general directorship. He took part in the administration of the Commune in '89, but was soon set aside, and perished on the scaffold in '94. His widow (*née* Mlle. de Bastard), whose influence pre-

dominated in the education of their daughters, was a worthy woman, of an original mind, acute, lively, and extremely intelligent. Deeply moved by the experiences of her time, she seems to have been endowed with that superiority of character and insight which enables one, while comprehending life as it is, to control and make it what it should be for others. Mme. de Vergennes reared her two girls soberly and even austerely, with a view to the altered social conditions which she foresaw. The sudden diminution of importance which the family experienced on the death of the minister uncle in 1787 was her first lesson. It did not surprise her, for she had early studied her *La Bruyère*. She entertained a deep distrust of the Revolution, and her advice to her husband had been to quit France before matters reached a fatal extremity. He not consenting, she resolved to abide by his decision, to face misfortune bravely, and to save their young family on the morrow of their disasters.

We may therefore consider that Mme. de Rémusat was fortunate in her cradle. By her first decisive circumstances of environment in infancy there had been planted and developed within her the germs of a prudence which was to grow with her growth. Of that social medium to which she was born, as of that in which her senior, Mlle. de Meulan, grew up, it may be said (I employ, as a matter of convenience, the forcible words of another), "It was a family which had furnished high functionaries, and moved in good society, and which, without exactly belonging either to the aristocratic or philosophical clique, had points of contact with them both, and gave its support, though cautiously, to the movements of the age," — just as, in politics,

M. de Vergennes had helped forward the Revolution in America, and, as a colleague of Turgot and Necker, prepared the way for the Revolution in France, without being either a *philosophe* or an innovator.

Little Claire remained under the sheltering wing and immediate authority of her mother until their severest troubles were over. Afterwards, in an extremely retired part of the country, she protracted, beside her younger sister,¹ her own simple, peaceful, studious childhood, approaching without anxiety the period of early youth, while the inappreciable substratum of her healthful, affectionate, solid, and yet refined character was accumulating day by day. The qualities wherewith nature had endowed her were consolidated by a slow and careful education. Her very countenance and the contour of her features announced, or rather betrayed, a little too clearly, it may be, the sober character of her private tastes, which nevertheless must not be exaggerated, for those tastes were never beyond her years. Her classic face was animated most of all by the expression of her very beautiful black eyes. The rest of her features, though not striking at first, rather gained upon inspection, and her whole person seemed to improve the longer you regarded it. She must even then have observed that simplicity in dress to which she recurred whenever it was possible for her to do so, but which she never carried beyond the point of becoming negligence. I do not know whether then, as at a later period, she persisted in so arranging her hair as partially to conceal her forehead, which would otherwise have been very fine.

¹ Now Countess de Nansouty.

She was married at sixteen to M. de Rémusat, a former magistrate of the supreme court, and the marriage was one of affection. In this bridegroom of double her own age she found an accomplished guide and steadfast friend; and with him, her mother, and her sister, she continued for some years after her marriage to live a life of retirement, quiet enjoyment, and intellectual culture. Quotations from Horace used sometimes to escape her, showing that, like Mme. de la Fayette and Mme. de Sévigné, she knew Latin, having learned it in that season of peaceful leisure under the tuition of her husband and beside the cradle of her son; for she was a mother at seventeen.

Thus all things conspired to create in her an exquisite good sense and what I shall call an ornate precision of mind. The valley of Montmorency was the scene of their happiness. They lived first at Saint-Gratien, and afterwards at Sannois. I find, among the papers and notes of a somewhat later period, a regretful reference to her perfect blessedness in those days beside the mother whom she was so soon to lose. "I think I see her still," she wrote for the benefit of her son, "in the little house which you perhaps remember. My imagination paints her in the midst of us, employed upon some piece of work destined for one of her girls, enlivening our evenings by her piquant and versatile conversation, now relating in her own original style a succession of delightful stories, or what appeared such because she lent them a charm in the telling which no one else could ever impart; now stimulating the company by some serious discussion which she knew equally well how to prolong with interest, or terminate with merriment, as the occasion might demand.

Amid the genial pleasantries which she always had ready, there welled up at times sagacious and profound reflections which her good taste made her always careful to invest with a certain feminine hue." Without laying too much stress on the old family portrait which we have chosen for the frontispiece to our article, and which has a kind of authoritative bearing upon our whole theme, — without attempting either to explore the mysteries of transmitted mental characteristics, — does it not appear, almost at the first glance, as if the ample vitality of the mother must have admitted of division and manifold fructification among her descendants, like any rich inheritance? The daughter with whom we are at present occupied will develop the more serious, and, if I may so express myself, philosophical side of her nature. In the other we possess, we welcome back to life, I had almost said that we daily applaud, her smiling fertility of device and brilliancy of imagination;¹ while her natural, primitive vein, her unfailing fount of admirable wit, is not so far exhausted but it breaks out in the felicitous pungency of that grandson whom she caressed and captivated in his infancy.

There lived, at this time, at Sannois, a woman of a very different turn of mind from Mme. de Vergennes, and belonging to a far earlier generation — Mme. d'Houdetot. The estates of the two families were separated merely by a boundary wall, and they were united in the closest manner by the ties of vicinage and kindly courtesy. The intimacy which grew up between them had a lasting effect upon the mind of Mme. de Rémusat, and, to some extent, determined the social

¹ Mme. de Nansouty is the author of a vast number of proverbs and short, popular comedies.

medium in which her life was passed. Mme. d'Houdetot died in January, 1813, at the age of eighty-three. In the years to which we refer,—that is, the years immediately preceding 1800,—there were gathered in the *salon* of this charming old lady the remnants both of fashionable and philosophic society,—never indeed entirely exiled thence. It may be said of Mme. d'Houdetot, that her ideal existence was always bounded by that Montmorency valley where the ardent devotion of Jean Jacques has engraved her memory, as it were, in immortal characters. There, again and again, her idyllic spring-time renewed its bloom, and the freshness of her impressions continued unimpaired until her dying day. She even remained in the country during the Reign of Terror, her retreat being respected, and her relatives flocking about her; and “I can readily believe,” writes Mme. de Rémusat, in a charming portrait of her venerable friend, “that she retains of those frightful days, merely the memory of the increased tenderness and consideration which they procured for her.” Mme. d'Houdetot was one of those spirits which may be described in a word,—*they passed through life seeing its brightest side*. The thing may still be done, as far as one's immediate surroundings are concerned. The blissful delusion which envelops a loving nature possesses the power of radiation, and is imparted, temporarily at least, to surrounding objects. But I have before me, as I write, a detailed portrait, bearing for a motto these words of Massillon: “It is always love which decides man;” and from this portrait it is my intention to extract a few passages, both because its lighter tints are laid on with admirable precision, and because we shall thus become familiar

with the nice and judicious observation and the pure and elegant style of the artist.

"It would hardly be possible," writes Mme. de Rémusat, "to carry, I will not say kindness, but rather benevolence, much farther than did Mme. d'Houdetot. Kindness implies a sort of discernment of evil—its recognition and pardon. Mme. d'Houdetot never observed it in any one. We have seen her actually pained at the expression in her presence of the lightest degree of blame. On such occasions she would impose silence; not sternly, but merely by showing how unpleasantly she had been affected. To this benevolent temper was due the perennial youthfulness of her feelings and her tastes. It may be that a censorious temper sharpens rather than enlarges the mind; it certainly hardens the heart, and produces a premature disenchantment which takes all the color out of life. Blessed is the man who dies before he is undeceived. The light, transparent veil remaining before his eyes imparts to all surrounding objects a freshness and a beauty which shall not grow dim with age. Thus Mme. d'Houdetot used to say, 'Pleasures have forsaken me, but I cannot reproach myself with having ever become disgusted with any pleasure.' This mood of mind rendered her habitually lenient, and always at her ease with the young. She allowed them to enjoy the good things which she herself had fully appreciated, and the memory of which she held dear; for she regarded with a kind of gratitude each period of her life.

"From the same expansive temperament proceeded her early and ardent fondness for the country. Eagerly welcoming all impressions, she took good care not to

miss those which depend upon a pleasant site and smiling verdure. She paused in ecstasy at a point of view which pleased her, listened enraptured to the singing of birds, and dwelt with delight on a beautiful flower, — and this to the very end of life. In her youth she had opened her heart to all the world, and those tastes which she retained into the evening of her days beautified her old age as much as they had adorned that happy period when every sensation has its attendant pleasure.

“Reappearing in society when our troubles were over, she came with all her old kindliness of spirit, ready, at least, to enjoy what she could. That need of loving which was always paramount with her, led her to supply the places of the friends she had lost by younger favorites, whom she selected with taste, and whose freshness of devotion made her forget her bereavements. She felt that she honored those whom she had loved, and of whom she had been deprived, by cultivating at an advanced age her own affections. Too weak to feed, in her declining years, on memory alone, she felt the necessity of loving while she lived. By the help of a kind Providence, she was preserved in her last days from that isolation which ordinarily precedes the end. Assiduous and delicate attentions imparted to the closing scenes of her life a coloring bright and fair as that of spring. One fond friendship¹ even assumed the form which the attachments she inspired had been wont to take. An austere and disenchanted reason might smile sometimes at the eternal juvenility of her heart ; but the smile had nought of malice, and, to the last, *Mme. d’Houdetot* found in the world that affectionate

¹ That of *M. de Sommariva*.

indulgence which is ordinarily awarded to a winning child.

"She proved, moreover, by the fortitude and calmness evinced in her last moments, that the faculties of her heart were not enfeebled by their protracted exercise. She realized that she was dying; but, in taking her leave of a life that had been so blessed, she let fall but one expression of regret, as tender as it was affecting. 'Do not forget me,' she said to the relatives and friends who were weeping at her bedside; 'I should have more courage if I had not to part from you. At least let me live in your remembrance.' Thus did the life whose light was so soon to be extinguished flame up once more at the bidding of affection; and the words 'I love' were the last her soul exhaled as it passed away to God."¹

This pleasing portrait was executed by Mme. de Rémusat in 1813. Fifteen years before, she had made her first appearance in that society of the Restoration which was made up of the *débris* of so many circles, and which set itself to smile so graciously beneath its wrinkles. Mme. d'Houdetot's *salon*, where the old

¹ By way of commentary and pendant to this sweet pastel, we shall take the liberty of transcribing some verses of Mme. d'Houdetot's own; for much of the poetry of the good old time is still pleasing, despite its antiquated air. It is an imitation of Marot, containing under a light disguise a tender confession. The fragment may be rendered as follows:—

"In youth I loved. Through all that bright, brief season
 Love seemed, and love alone, my days to fill;
 Then when I came to years of calmer reason,
 I minded reason's voice in loving still.
 Now I am old; the days of devastation
 Are on me, and yet happiness is mine;
 For love is still my hope and consolation:
 If love were lost, no hope for me would shine."

philosophers, M. de Saint-Lambert, M. Suard, and the Abbé Morellet, still reigned, was philosophic from a literary point of view merely, and no longer politically. The Revolution had chilled and disenchanted many hearts. "Society presented," says an excellent judge, "a peaceable admixture of modern lights with reactionary views, and of old-time tastes with the simple manners induced by the misfortunes of the age and the bitter regrets incident to the woes of '93." Men showed, above all things, a keen desire for happiness, for ultimate repose and social enjoyments. Those who would have been antagonistic ten years before consorted marvellously. Amid this intersection of ideas and sentiments, nothing hindered the free play of thought, or predetermined its direction. Young minds found in their own uprightness a means of self-restraint and an aid to progress. Men were royalists in politics in the sense that they preferred Louis XVI. to his judges, and the *émigrés* to the Jacobins; but, as a general thing, they showed themselves disposed to welcome any constituted authority, anything which promised order and repose. Such was good society under the consulate, a form of government which from the outset it recognized and hailed.

Mme. de Vergennes had always had some knowledge of Mme. Beauharnais, and their acquaintance continued after the latter became Mme. Bonaparte. They had met by chance at first in a little village in the neighborhood of Paris, whither they had gone to pass the terrible summer of '93; and chance had again brought them together during the expedition to Egypt. Mme. Bonaparte was then living at Malmaison, and Mme. de Vergennes came to pass a few months in the chateau

of a friend at Croissi, in the immediate vicinity. The fortune of the illustrious absentee was far from being as secure at that juncture as it appears to us to-day, and his distant star seemed at intervals on the point of an eclipse. After the dazzling celebrity of the first Italian campaign, Mme. Bonaparte, as it would seem, found herself to some extent neglected and set aside, and exposed to a thousand affronts and anxieties, amid the sumptuous remains of her first transitory grandeur. Naturally open and prone to confide in others, she had no sooner renewed her acquaintance with Mme. de Vergennes than she contrived to make her the recipient of all sorts of confidential disclosures. In the midst of her apprehensions came the landing at Frejus, which promptly reseated her in her triumphal car. About a year afterwards, when the new government had become firmly established, Mme. de Vergennes applied to the wife of the first consul to obtain some position for her son-in-law, — a place, for instance, in the council of state, — and found her all grace and kindness. The Tuileries was reopened, and Mme. Bonaparte instantly conceived the idea of taking Mme. de Rémusat for one of her ladies in waiting, and thereby attaching her husband to the service of the consul. It was more than had been desired, and too much; but such favors were even then commands, and not to be disputed, and M. de Rémusat became prefect of the palace.

An attempt was being made to found a court. It was in the autumn of 1802 that Mme. de Rémusat was first established at Saint-Cloud, where the first consul then resided. She was twenty-two years of age. Her nomination and her husband's were an event in the history of that retinue which hitherto had been purely

military. It betrayed the master's thought, and was his first advance towards winning persons of consideration to his court—the first link, so to speak, in the chain which was to bind him to the civil order. There were many degrees among the old names; but that of Vergennes was familiar, historic, and associated with the old *régime*. It opened the way for greater, but as yet rebellious, names, whose bearers, however, were not found wanting when the consulate became an empire, but rather rushed forward in throngs. Besides, the consul, *who liked to have that known for him which he did not know*, found in M. de Rémusat a singular and unfailing tact, as well as perfect acquaintance with the conventional usages which were to be reëstablished—with all, in short, which could subserve an important and delicate part of his design; for he aimed at nothing less than a restoration of the forms of polite society.

I should have too much to say, and I should say too little, were I to follow Mme. de Rémusat through that court-life into which she found herself thrust at twenty-two, after her sober and solitary youth. Gifted with prudence and maturity beyond her years, her upright soul avoided danger, and her vigorous mind gathered instruction from what she saw. The grateful and enthusiastic devotion which she had at first felt bound to show sustained so many consecutive checks that it could not long endure. She herself has described its gradual decline in those *Memoirs*, the cream of which I hardly feel that I have a right to appropriate.¹ We

¹ She had done more than this. Having, like Mme. de Motteville, an excellent place for seeing the *pretty comedy* then enacting, she had intended to perpetuate the impressions it produced upon her at the time. She had each evening noted down as

shall presently encounter some of the results of her experience under the guise of fiction, where we can, at least, dilate on them with greater freedom.

One essential, and, as it were, historic, peculiarity remains to be noted. Mme. de Rémusat was one of those who talked most with the consul during these first years. To what did she owe this privilege? She herself has accounted for the fact in a half-bantering tone. She brought a frank simplicity and easy habits of conversation into that world of etiquette and watch-words, the greater number of whose denizens were at first both ignorant and timid. She admired Bonaparte, and had not yet learned to fear him. To the abrupt questions and rapid monologues with which he addressed them, the other women generally replied by monosyllables only, while she sometimes had a thought, and ventured to express it. At first this caused something very like scandal, and awakened extreme jealousy; and she was obliged to purchase forgiveness by silence on the morrow. But she could do better even than respond, when, as often happened, Bonaparte inadvertently thought aloud. She could hear, comprehend,

accurately as possible the events, the emotions, and the conversations of the day. Unluckily, in 1815, during the hundred days, some peculiar circumstances, which she doubtless exaggerated, excited her alarm on the score of these papers, teeming as they were with items and with names. Veracity is almost always terrible. She sallied forth to place them in the keeping of a friend, but, failing to find her, she returned in haste, and threw them into the fire. Before an hour had elapsed, she regretted what she had done. It was not until the publication of Mme. de Staël's work on the French Revolution that she felt the courage to undertake once more the collection of her reminiscences. In default of the first incomparable narrative, those will be partially indemnified who shall one day read the second.

and follow him. He was very quick to detect this sort of intelligence, and had an unbounded admiration for it, especially in a woman. Can it by chance have been because it amazed him? M. de La Mennais, in a recent production, from which one might certainly select more gracious thoughts, has said, "I never met a woman who could follow a train of reasoning for a quarter of an hour." This is very hard, and savors a little of spleen. Bonaparte was not exactly gallant, and he showed himself capable of being very severe, especially on the intellects of women; but the memory of Mme. de Rémusat would have prevented him from making a remark like this.

Different causes and circumstances soon checked this early communicativeness, and put a stop to the conversations of the hero with the woman of intelligence—first her own realization of the uncertainty of her position, then the increasing stringency of imperial etiquette. Mme. de Rémusat's was undoubtedly too grave and active a mind for her to hear politics discussed without subsequent reflection. This the emperor perceived, and it made him suspicious. She was attached by affection as well as position to the Empress Josephine, and she felt it to be her one duty to follow the fortunes of the latter. Her health soon becoming impaired, she was unable to discharge many of the active duties of her post, simplified as these were towards the last in the retreat of Malmaison. M. de Rémusat continued near the emperor, fulfilling the functions of his office with more of precision and conscientiousness than of ardor. They had early obtained a conspicuous position, but they were never entirely in favor. After the divorce, there was a marked and de-

finite withdrawal of patronage; and their close connection with M. de Talleyrand during the last years of the empire caused the shadow of his disgrace to fall upon them.

A taste for society, as affording opportunities for conversation, and for literature, as the almost constant employment of her life, was now growing upon Mme. de Rémusat. Sober reflections occurred prematurely to her mind, and long before her youth was spent she had arrived at maturity. The note-books in which she recorded her thoughts admit of our tracing her history in this regard far more minutely than might be supposed possible. In a journey to Canterets, undertaken in 1806 for the benefit of her health, the solitude in which she found herself after quitting the court where her experience had been so accelerated afforded her an opportunity of gathering up the fruits of that experience, bitter even then. Her suffering condition revived those religious ideas which had never been absent in her youth, and merely distracted in subsequent years. She prayed, she dreamed, above all she meditated. "Meditation," she says, "differs from reverie in being the voluntary operation of a well-regulated mind." Certain reflections which she penned at about this time, after reading those of Mme. du Châtelet on Happiness, make it apparent that her theory of morals differed as widely from the hard, selfish, calculating ethics of the friend of Voltaire, as from that purely sentimental morality which softer souls had imbibed from Rousseau. Her morality sought its support in reason, and aimed at the performance of difficult duty. Yet positive religious beliefs, and even observances (we have and can adduce the proof of what we say), blended

with her ethical theories as she advanced in life, exercising a greater influence than the world, or perhaps her friends, would have credited, though somewhat less, it may be, than Mme. de Rémusat herself supposed. In an excellent fragment on Coquetry, dated 1813, she needed but to consult her own observation as a moralist, her sound judgment, her refined and quiet taste, to speak as follows:—

“It is in the years between thirty and forty that women are commonly most inclined to coquetry. Younger, they please without effort, and by virtue of their very ignorance. But when their spring-time has passed, they begin to employ address in order to retain the homage which it would be painful to renounce. Sometimes they attempt to adorn themselves with a semblance of that innocence to which so much of their success was due. They are wrong. Every age has its advantages as well as its duties. A woman of thirty has seen the world, and has knowledge of evil, even if she has done nothing but good. At that age she is ordinarily a mother. Experience has long been her true safeguard. She ought, therefore, to be calm, reserved, nay, even a little cold. She must put off the grace of trustful unreserve, and assume the majestic dignity conferred by the titles wife and mother. At this crisis, she must have the courage to unclasp the zone of Venus. Consider the charms whereof the poet declares it to be composed.¹ Are they the ornaments of virtuous maternity?

1

“There Love, there young Desire,
There fond Discourse, and there Persuasion, dwelt,
Which oft enthralles the mind of wisest man.”

Lord Derby's Iliad, Book XIV.

“But what strength it requires to be the first to lay aside an adornment like this! With a little care it would still so well become the wearer! Yet a few more years, and the zone will fall of itself, refusing to deck charms that are already withered. Then how would one blush at the sight of it, sadly repeating, like the Greek courtesan who consecrated her mirror to eternal beauty, ‘I give thee to Venus, for she is always fair.’

“Is it not wiser to provide in advance for our inevitable disappointment by anticipating it with courage? The sacrifices which Reason dictates have this advantage, that the effort they cost is itself their reward. O mothers, gather your children about you early. Dare to say when they come into the world that your youth is passing into theirs. O mothers, be mothers, and you will be wise and happy!”

She uttered these sentences with deep feeling, with a thrilling accent, and a practical reference to herself. At that age she did, in fact, unclasp the girdle which, in her case, had enclosed none but modest graces. We have unanimous testimony to the fact that she need not so soon have relinquished it. A happy idea of her personal appearance at this time may be gathered from the very ingenious portrait of *Clary*, traced by a hand — I was going to say a claw — familiar, indeed, though seldom engaged in work like this, and little used to writing.¹ Her face, like her mind, had an enduring charm. The play of her lips, her fine teeth, and the

¹ One day, when M. de Talleyrand was President of the Senate, he found that the session was becoming tedious, and seizing a sheet of official paper, he executed, in his fine handwriting, the portrait of *Clary*.

brilliance of her eyes, lit up her countenance as she talked. Her figure was still youthful. She was thirty-two, but she appeared twenty-eight.

She saw much in these years of Mme. de Vintimille, and of that select circle whose internal history M. Joubert has just unfolded in a manner as affectionate as it is vivacious. Society, at Mme. de Vintimille's was more and better than a sequel to the eighteenth century. In those days of universal revivification there occurred, in certain sheltered nooks, a blossoming anew, or, if the expression be allowable, a second crop of the pure Louis Quatorze spirit. Taste ascended to remote fountains, and Religion, through her servant, M. de Chateaubriand, held up for imitation the old, sublime models. Meanwhile, outside, intelligent publishers assisted the general reaction, by reprinting collections of old memoirs, and short selections from the letters of Mme. de Montmorency, Mlle. de Scudéry, and Mme. de Coulanges; and they even tell of a clique, where the ladies used to wear mourning on the anniversary of Mme. de Sévigné's death.

The fashion of pen-and-ink portraits, which had never entirely passed away, seemed to revive as in the palmy days of Mademoiselle. After that of Mme. d'Houdetot, by Mme. de Rémusat, I might quote her portrait of Mme. de Vintimille, and that of M. Pasquier, who, in many respects, would seem hardly to belong to the world of to-day, sterling qualities being in him so thoroughly blended with the winning graces of society. Mme. de Rémusat, in the hours of freedom remaining to her after the discharge of those official duties which were now so greatly lightened, loved to remain at home. People came to see her regularly.

Conversation flourished at her house, as in the days of the old *régime*, and her drawing-room in the Place Louis Quinze, was, to all intents and purposes, a *salon* of the empire. The company which had been wont to visit Mme. de Vintimille and Mme. d'Houdetot reassembled here, slightly altered and rejuvenated — M. Molé, M. Suard, the Abbé Morellet, M. de Bausset (the cardinal), M. Galloix, M. Cuvier, Mlle. de Meulan, and M. Guizot, M. de Barante occasionally, M. de Fontanes, Gérard the painter, and, later, M. Villemain. Among some autograph memorials in one of those albums, which were richer and more suggestive formerly than now, where we read the names of friends with a mixture of curiosity and sadness, intent to make out the peculiar and already remote evidence furnished by each one, I have been delighted to discover, and I hereby purloin, one luminous page, signed with the name of Chateaubriand. There are pens the slightest product of which should be carefully treasured, and not suffered to fade. M. de Chateaubriand has a grandeur even in his grace. Homer, I fancy, would have been Homer still, though reduced to the proportions of the Anthology. Here is this brilliant fragment.

“Glory, Love, and Friendship came down one day from Olympus, to visit the denizens of earth. These divinities resolved to write the history of their journey, and to record the names of those mortals who might offer them hospitality. For this purpose, Glory provided herself with a marble slab, Love with waxed tablets, and Friendship with a blank book. The three wandered about the world, and one evening presented themselves at my door. I made haste to receive them

with the reverence due the gods. When they left me on the morrow, Glory was unable to engrave my name upon her marble. Love, after having written it upon her tablets, erased it with a smile; but Friendship promised to preserve it in her book.

“DE CHATEAUBRIAND, 1813.¹”

It were a grave question to determine whether Mme. de Rémusat added any new or peculiar element to the social intercourse of her time. Her aim was, undoubtedly, to introduce earnestness into society. Until then

¹ When this was first published, M. de Chateaubriand was annoyed at being detected on friendly terms, and even high in favor, with a member of that imperial or doctrinary world which he has since regarded with constant coldness, and even antipathy. He told Mme. Récamier that he had never written in Mme. de Rémusat's album, and that the fragment was not his, and Mme. Récamier hastened to assure me of the fact. Truth, for this charming woman, was merely what her friends desired. There was but one answer to be made to M. de Chateaubriand's disavowal, and I make it unwillingly, namely, that the fragment was written in his own hand, and signed with his own name, in the book from which I had copied it. The encomiums with which I had accompanied the piece, and which he must just have read, even the great name of Homer, which I had introduced designedly, and by way of precaution, had not sufficed to exorcise a fit of ill-humor and sharp contradiction on the part of one in whom the great man was so mixed up with the man of a party and a *cotérie*. Incredible are the pains we have to take, and the well-intentioned strategy to which we must resort, we critics who aim at enriching the contemporary history of letters on newly-raised and delicate points, — we who need to be well informed, but who will write under nobody's dictation. I have never, thank God, had to bear authority in this world, but I have had to manage the vanities of authors, and that is quite enough.

the two things had been sensibly divided. People were in earnest, if possible, in the study and in retirement, but in the world it was customary to give and receive nothing but frivolity and pure amusement. There was room, no doubt, for an attempt at compromise and reconciliation, and of this Mme. de Rémusat must at least have dreamed. We ourselves, as professional literati, judging from a distance and by books only, should say that if Mme. de Staël introduced and maintained a kind of high-flown earnestness, and if Mme. Guizot did not shrink from a logical, and, at times, disputatious earnestness, Mme. de Rémusat aimed at an earnestness at once more uniform and more gentle than theirs. But distinctions of this sort are mere formulas, drawn up after the event, and for the use of posterity. I make haste to abandon all such, for I seem to see those contemporaries who would have been the only competent and reliable witnesses in this case, smiling at my attempt.

In any history (unhappily well nigh impossible) of conversation in France, a single circumstance would suffice to illustrate the quality and assign the rank of Mme. de Rémusat (and consider, only, what a blending of seriousness and grace that circumstance implies): she was probably the woman with whom both Napoleon and M. de Talleyrand liked best to talk.

I have just said that the history of conversation, like that of all which is essentially relative and transitory, and dependent for the most part upon passing impressions, seems to me impossible. Where could the material for such a work be sought, and how could its limits be defined? Even if the things said could be accurately transferred to writing, they would become

congealed in the process, for paper cannot smile.¹ Nothing so well illustrates the taste of a time as its prevalent style of conversation. The serious discussions of yesterday would seem a trifle timorous, or superficial, or insipid by to-morrow, were echo to report them faithfully. The refined and polished conversation of one period will appear heavy to another. Mme. de Rémusat has ingeniously remarked in the eleventh chapter of her *Essay on Education*, "If we attempt to determine the auspicious moment when the conversation of the past arrived at ideal perfection, it eludes our grasp, and escapes into the distance, like every golden age. Mme. du Deffand and Mme. du Châtelet deplore the manners of men, and Mme. de Lambert declares that they have lost the true tone. Mme. des Houlières believes that we must go back to Bassompierre, and Mme. de La Fayette, in her romance, removes the date to the times of the Valois. Hence I would fain infer, that in this respect even our own case is not entirely desperate, for all our habitual lamentations. When one regrets so keenly the delights of conversation (just as when one is beset by moral scruples), one is near deserving a favorable exception, and snatching a few happy moments. And, after all, who ever had more?"

And now that I am on the subject of introducing a graver element into social intercourse, I desire to note, in passing, one consequence which might ensue — the

¹ The objection has been urged against *Collections of Thoughts*, that when they are not commonplace they often appear pretentious; yet the same things would have struck us far otherwise, if we had heard them said. The smile and accent of the speaker would have won them acceptance; but fix them upon paper and it is quite another thing. Paper is brutish (*bête*.)

more so as it is especially a literary consequence. Shall I venture to say, then, that to have the perpetual surface current of society deeper and more even, would not be an unmixed advantage? From the writer's point of view it would be decidedly inconvenient, were there any greater uniformity than at present between what is spoken and what is written. We speak with more of warmth (*verve*), we write with less. The tact and propriety assumed with the pen are not always to the writer of talent an adequate compensation for what he resigns. Were it customary, therefore, to say the things which we intend to write, our ideas would perhaps be rendered more flexible; but they would also suffer a premature loss of strength and color, and we should write with less of freshness even than now. "We should not," as some one has very wittily said, "be thrilled, some fine morning, by the discovery of truth; we should seem to have known it from all eternity." Yet society would gain in interest, and afford nobler employment for our leisure; and, in short, those persons for whom it is neither an accident, a thoroughfare, nor a place of forcible detention, but an habitual and necessary residence, must needs make the most of it — must even think and reflect aloud therein, for fear of not finding time to reflect at all. Now, thinking aloud before the world, operating upon our ideas in presence of witnesses, is a brilliant exercise, a most fascinating amusement, which comes, finally, to supersede all others. Chaste, collected, earnest thought is scared away by it. Such thought is shy and proud. Then, too, one must study as well as think aloud. The style is sharpened; it gains in pungency, rapidity, and interest, but it loses originality and depth. Sensibility

and imaginative power, a reticent and fastidious mode of expression, are not so acquired and preserved. M. de Buffon knew this well, and too well. Outside the castle of Montbar he was not lavish of these gifts.

To resume our narrative: Mme. de Remusat's taste had always been decidedly literary. She had written early with facility and grace. Short essays of hers have been discovered, composed at the age of fifteen or sixteen, as well as novelettes and attempted translations and even versions, of some of the Odes of Horace. Every night for years she committed to paper a graphic narrative of the day's events. All her life she wrote many and long letters, the greater part of which have been preserved and may yet be collected. I shall, however, allude only to her romances, of which she composed several, and two of which I have read. The first, entitled Charles and Claire, or the Flute, was published in 1814. The plot is graceful and peculiar. In a certain German town, two French *émigrés*, neighbors, a youth and a maiden, become enamoured without ever having seen one another. The young man is in feeble health, but usually plays the flute in the evening after he returns to his rooms. The young girl, who lodges in the convent hard by, and has the care of her invalid grandmother, writes him one day, — having understood that he is French, — and begs him not to play at certain hours, because it disturbs her grandmother, while at the same time she entreats him not to desist entirely, since, at other times, it is a great diversion both to the poor lady and herself. Subsequently, of this vague intercourse, begun by musical sounds and carried on by letters, — sundry sufficiently natural accidents all the while preventing a meeting, — there is born such a love as

might be expected to arise between two very young, very pure, and very unhappy beings. The little servant, Marie, who acts as messenger to the young man, answers his few questions, thereby giving shape to the lover's dreams, while she stimulates his imagination. The maiden resolves to show the letters to her father when he comes, and he is daily expected. Reassured by this thought, she continues the correspondence. The flute, discoursing at regular intervals its most affecting music, is their real rendezvous. The young man talks of *our little concerts*, and, although he is the sole performer, he is right, for their hearts are in unison. On one occasion, a few of the airs of Languedoc, happily chosen, draw tears from the old lady's eyes, and awaken moving reminiscences, though her memory is weak; on another, — it is Claire's birthday, — royalist airs are not wanting, — *Charmente Gabrielle* and *Richard ô mon roi!* — and the tender passion of these two is redoubled by being associated with the loves of their ancestors. Finally, the young man, who is reading Werther, becomes excited, his letters grow more ardent, and the whole thing would have been spoiled, had not the maiden's father sent one of his sisters to the spot in his stead, to remove her niece before the ensuing day. The poor child has barely time to warn the amiable and devoted neighbor, whom she has never seen. She is to leave at five o'clock in the morning, and for a moment, — a second merely, — between the convent-sill and the step of the post-chaise, the young man tries to obtain a first and last sight of her; but the handkerchief, which she presses to her eyes in the emotion caused by her friend's presence, conceals her face, and the moment is lost. She has, at least, dropped the handkerchief,

which he seizes ; but she is gone forever. Here we have what seems a very pretty conception ; two sister souls, separated by a partition, a mere veil, divining one another from the first, but never meeting face to face. Perhaps, however, it is an idea more striking to broach than to unfold — more suited to a chapter in the *Sentimental Journey*, or the *Voyage autour de ma Chambre*, than to a development in the form of letters. The reader may remember, in the *Memoirs of Silvio Pellico*, the mere outline of a touching romance in connection with that repentant Magdalene, whom he simply hears chanting canticles through his prison wall. But here the romance remains, so to speak, in the air, — in the condition of the Virgin's thread, floating as a pure dream. Mme. de Rémusat has very well arranged and rendered probable the sequence of her various little scenes. Her style is always elegant and pure, but there are places where I should prefer, if not more brilliancy, at least a little negligence, and a less premeditated air. This novel is very nearly worthy of a place with some of the pleasing productions of Mme. Riccoboni and Mme. de Souza ; but it lacks a certain down of youth, — of faded youth even ; — or, rather, I would say, in all simplicity, that it seems to have been kept too long in the drawer, and so failed to blossom in its season for want of air and sunshine.

In works of this sort, especially, — works which have color and a blossom, — there is an inestimable difference between fading in a drawer and fading in the open air. Works which are in the latter case — and it is the common lot even of the best — may be said to have had their day. They won the public once for all, and produced a certain impression. There is gra-

dation in their very decay. They grow old harmoniously.

The second of Mme. de Rémusat's novels to which I shall allude — the Spanish Letters, or the Minister — is a composition of another and more important order. Commenced in 1805, at the imperial court, it was afterwards laid aside and not completed until 1820. In the course of the work we find traces of the successive modifications which its author's ideas underwent, for the ever austere mind of Mme. de Rémusat was growing and ripening continually.

She had been all ready for the first Restoration. Toward the close of the empire the general fatigue and indifference of mind became very great. For herself she had seen its springs too near, and touched them too often, to have escaped disgust at its workings. For years she had been in the habit of discussing these things confidentially with the greatest convert of the day. It was then with a feeling of hope and a certain revival of old memories, that she welcomed the restoration of an order of things whereby the position which she had won would at least be lowered and perhaps forfeited. The little story of the two young *émigrés*, published in 1814, shows clearly enough, in some of its details, the Bourbon tinge which her thoughts had then assumed. But the excesses and absurdities of the royalist reaction, especially during the year 1815, brought her back to juster views and sounder opinions. The idea of a constitutional government recurred to the public mind as if it had been new, and her vigorous intellect embraced it at the outset in its widest acceptance. During the struggle which ensued, the conditions of a new order of society and a laborious

future were unmasked on all hands, and to these she applied a mother's meditative forethought. The main results of her final experience were to be summed up in her work on female education; but the Spanish Letters also gained thereby, and the first conception of the romance was enlarged by her fuller observation of men and things.

The original aim of the story had probably been merely to analyze and describe the embarrassments in love of a young Spaniard, Don Alphonso d'Alovera, placed between two charming girls, one of whom he loves, while his ambition counsels him to prefer the other. The general tone might, I imagine, have been indicated by thoughts like this: "Why must the prudence that suspects ever prevail over the confidence that hopes? Why should all the arrangements of society combine to disturb the heart's true joy?" But as the work proceeds, this idea is enlarged and transformed. The young lover finds himself mixed up in great events. The minister, the father of Inez, whom he is expected to love, occupies a larger space, and the author exceeds her first plan in the delineation of his character. Walter Scott's novels had by this time crossed the Channel, and people began to think of fidelity in the reproduction of places and of periods. Here the historic conception was originally vague. The reign was not designated, and the minister was merely described in general terms; but Mme. de Rémusat, while pursuing this plan, has succeeded in imparting a life-like coloring to her pictures, and in producing genuine Spaniards, a genuine court, and genuine monks. There is a Jesuit father who speaks and acts to perfection. Thus we have a long romance in the epistolary form,

elaborate, sensible, regular, of moderate but ever-increasing interest, the characters well studied and consistent, the situations prolonged and complicated, but clearly defined and perfectly resolved. I find here the customs of the world and the refinements of sentiment mingled in proportions which are neither wholly worldly nor ideally romantic. The writer is evidently one who knows the heart, who perfectly understands what courts really are, and who does not tell all. We detect under altered names a transcript or reflection of her own successive impressions during her palace life. How can we fail to be reminded of her enthusiastic *début*, in 1802, when Don Alphonso exclaims, after a flattering remark of his sovereign, "O, my sister, what a force and potency the words of kings possess! How binding on us are the slightest testimonials of their favor! A little mark of kindness, a proof of their remembrance, often decides our destiny. The devotion of an entire lifetime is the response we feel we owe for the faintest manifestation of interest on their part." It would be very surprising were there no reminiscences of the Pyrenees, and of their hither side too, in the description of that rural life planned by the queen, when the king is ill, to afford him repose and to divert his mind from business and etiquette. "In fact, as soon as we arrived at Aranjuez, the king announced that, having perfect confidence in our reverence for himself, he should suspend all ceremonial, and every one would be at liberty to follow the dictates of his own fancy. You, my sister" (this is one of Alphonso's letters), "who are sometimes disposed to ridicule us courtiers a little, could not have failed to be amused at the embarrassment into which we were thrown by this declaration.

True, it was made with that austere gravity which the king knows not how to lay aside. Improvisation is always rather difficult to manage, and especially improvised freedom. I must confess that we hardly knew what to do with ours. Imagination dared not be very active in this matter, and our sovereigns themselves strove in vain to effect that which they had had power to permit. So, despite the favorable disposition both of master and subjects, things went on much as usual, and on our return to Madrid, each voluntarily took up his old habits, resuming, along with their former apartments, some the right to command, and others the right to obey.”¹ And the reflections which follow are perfectly and deplorably just. “In reality, my sister, the court ceremonial, of which so much complaint has been made, seems to me to have its use, and even its moral value. With the people who surround a prince, personal interest is so alert, and the baser human passions are so frequently aroused, that if it were necessary for us to act upon our real feelings and sensations, we should present a sad spectacle to the observer. Etiquette hides all this with a uniform veil. It is like correct time in music, which makes even discordant sounds appear harmonious.”

In this court there is a certain Countess de Lemos, a clever woman who dares to be herself, and to care

¹ One day the emperor had the comedians of some of the smaller theatres come and play before him. Whatever the occasion may have been, he permitted and even desired more of gayety than was customary in these court performances. M. de Talleyrand, as grand chamberlain, signified, with his most solemn visage, his master's august desire — “Gentlemen, the emperor earnestly requests you to be amused.”

little for what people think of her. "The independent attitude," says one author, "which she succeeds in preserving, has sometimes made me fancy that even in this reticent court, it might not be as difficult as we suppose to allow ourselves perfect freedom of speech if we would first consent to allow other people perfect freedom of conjecture." In fact, the world is quite ready to suppose a great deal. Don Alphonso has had the happiness of saving the queen's life, when on a hunt, and she has testified her gratitude with a vivacity which for once transcends the bounds of etiquette: hence he is supposed to be a favored lover. It is for the minister's interest, and a part of his policy that this supposition should gain credence, and Alphonso, to say the least, allows it. The subtle art with which his able patron attempts to inoculate him with this idea; the careless, casual manner in which he informs him of the current report; the revulsion of feeling, and the indignation manifested at the outset by Alphonso, who, however, is gradually imbued with the spirit of his part, and almost undertakes to perform it, — these things are skilfully touched. Throughout the romance the prime minister displays as much honesty as would befit one who on all needful occasions shows himself opposed to romance and sentiment. Judging from numerous scenes, and from the permanent basis of the character, we opine that M. de Talleyrand must often have furnished the model; but the portrait, though recognized with extreme ease, seems on the whole to have been somewhat softened and flattered by friendship. Those impassive features, *too well trained to betray even triumph; that half-kindly, half-mocking tone, which is habitual with him; the sweetness which is perhaps only*

an additional ruse, — these are items in the description which can apply to him alone. The author is far from denying to the Spanish minister all lovable qualities. “We frequently err in judgment through our inclination to believe that a man must be thoroughly and entirely what he is in the main. There is no such unity in nature; and because the life of a court, and familiarity with its intrigues, may have *blunted* the sensibilities of a given individual, we must not conclude that they are wholly destroyed.” One day, after a luxurious dinner given by the minister in question, the conversation took a remarkably interesting turn. “It is strange,” remarks one of the characters in the story; “but thanks to that independence of mind of which the minister gives us all an example, his diplomatic guests never seem to be studying how they may make their words as meaningless as possible. I said as much to the duke at night, when all the company had left. ‘I think,’ he replied, ‘it is a sign of mediocrity, as well as of disdain, in a statesman, to allow no serious question to be discussed in his presence. There is a good deal of important information which can only be acquired through conversation. But one must know how to resist the fascinations which attend it; for there is certainly a species of intoxication about the pleasures of the mind as well as about those of the body.’” The minister’s wily plot, while it fails to ruin the fortunes of those dearest to him, does but slightly retard his own fall. His old friend, the Countess de Lemos, had once said to him, “Beware of intrigue! When it becomes complicated it ceases to be a means, and is only an additional impediment.” At the time of his retirement, when he travels through the fair country which he had

not seen for so long, and on which he fixes his softened gaze with the shadow of a smile, I recognize one sublime thought. "In all the troubles which await us there comes one terrible moment which must be met, and which we must make haste to overpass. It is a dark and difficult passage—a kind of porch between despair and resignation. I would give it an inscription the very opposite of that which Dante places over the gates of hell. Once beyond it, the mind grows calm, and we measure our losses and perceive the consolations that remain. For a retiring minister that moment should come in the first day or the first night after his disgrace." Let us hope that all ministers who have fallen, or are yet to fall, may work in one day through this subterranean passage, which, like that of Posilippo, will quickly lead them to the sight of fairer skies.

I have not intended to do more than glance cursorily at a subject of which all cannot judge as well as I, and where it would take too long to adduce the proofs of what I say. For this purpose I should have needed to quote some of those truly tender and affecting scenes, where the queen, fettered by etiquette, and deceived by the semblance of that affection which all the world attributes to Alphonso, betrays her feminine weakness in his presence, and cannot restrain her tears. In short, the *Spanish Letters* is a very beautiful study, though it might need something besides notoriety to make it a beautiful romance.

We come now to Mme. de Rémusat's last work—the letters on *Female Education*, published by her son. As a general thing, serious and intelligent women are struck in their youth by the obstacles which the world

opposes to genuine sentiments and natural affections, and later with the impediments which are encountered by their sex in the way of connected thought, study, and profound application. Hence when young they are moved to compose sentimental novels, and at a later period to elaborate plans of education. In Mme. de Rémusat's case, a multitude of considerations helped to give the last-named turn to her maturer efforts. The Revolution had altered the condition of the different orders of society, and in some sort displaced the centre of power which was tending to become fixed in the middle classes. But civil disturbances and the ensuing splendors of the empire had concealed this result, and not until the advent of the Restoration was it indicated with any degree of clearness. The sudden return to certain superannuated usages, and the attempts to wrest the new central point, excited revolt, and rendered its situation more evident than before. Mme. de Rémusat, who had been to some extent distracted by the great events which she had seen so near, suddenly found herself, with her meditative turn of mind, face to face with these new and unforeseen questions, and in a position to be not merely keenly interested, but thoroughly informed about them. Her place and that of her husband were now in the constitutional party of the Restoration. Their shade of opinion coincided with that of the then centre-left. M. de Rémusat, who had been appointed prefect of Toulouse in 1815, and of Lille in 1814, was to retain his place until removed by minister Villèle as a first reactionary measure. This provincial life, although not without frequent breaks, allowed Mme. de Rémusat increased leisure, while she still kept up an intimate

acquaintance with the stirring world of Paris through the precocious son who was just entering society, and who corresponded freely with his mother. He even brought her new friends, and she found congenial spirits in M. and Mme. Guizot, and in M. de Barante. He also introduced her to Mme. de Broglie, of whom unfortunately she saw little, but for whom, during her last years, she cherished a sincere and tender friendship. If the noblest need of a reverent and pious son is to have his mother for prime confidant and companion, such a relation is also a most affecting restorative of a mother's youth. However intellectual she may be, her happiest fate is to understand all things through the heart. The peculiar affinity between mothers and sons has often been remarked. Through their sons mothers acquire greater mental courage; with them they willingly undertake journeys and conflicts; them they follow into realms of new ideas. The refined and placid woman, accustomed to the amenities of society, and content with them, whose mind is earnest and cultivated, and who scarce ever dreamed of transgressing the limits of her graceful horizon, is suddenly transformed. At the very season of repose, at the moment when the intellect is most prone to pause, and the heart to mourn and pine for all that is passing away, she, on the contrary, revives; she is kindled by new views, and greets them with a smile; she adopts projects of reform; and, instead of turning her back on the future, she hastens to meet it as in the morning of her days, accompanying, or rather preceding, her beloved guide. To see her from afar so light and active, you would declare her to be his sister.

Like Mme. Necker de Saussure and Mme. Guizot,

Mme. de Rémusat was deeply concerned for the future of her sex in that new society about to be established upon the quivering bases of the old. I shall not examine in detail a book which any reader will appreciate. The whole aim and spirit of the work are moral, earnest, graceful. We feel the presence in it of a peculiar inspiration, a kind of secret muse. One must be a mother to yearn thus tenderly over coming generations; and when she drew her ideal wife she was thinking of her son.

In the year 1820, therefore, Mme. de Rémusat was in the full maturity of her powers, and her opinions, though still active, had attained their final development. Her manners had become very simple, and even sprightly, and she is said to have been wonderfully easy in conversation. She was fond of all that is fresh and youthful; a little inclined to raillery; pious, or, rather, a Christian, making no great show of fervor, but decided, and deriving support from definite doctrines. Although old before her time, her health seemed better than formerly, or, at least, allowed her greater freedom of action. She was leading a life of domestic privacy, very happy, and entirely devoted to the happiness of her family, when she was prematurely taken from them in December of 1821. In a little autograph album of Thoughts I have found some precious revelations concerning the continuous development of her religious emotions, the distraction of her mind during her years of levity, and the reaction which she subsequently experienced. It is the complete history of an inner life, a vein hidden from the world, and unsuspected. Let us not be too ready to pass judgment on these mysteries of the soul. It is a consoling thought

that if we do not divine all the transient evil in the world, neither do we suspect all the good. After she went to Caunterets for her health, in 1806, her Christian experience was revived, and never afterwards wholly interrupted. We can trace its progress through this private compilation by successive extracts from Fénelon, Pascal, Bossuet, Nicole, and Saint Augustine, and by prayers which she had composed herself, or which had been furnished her by Mme. de Vintimille. She also took a copy of Mme. de Maintenon's beautiful letter to the Duchess de Ventadour. But these things relate merely to what she called her *partial enlistment*. The great event of her interior life, her complete reconciliation with God, occurred in April, 1812. Her own serious illness at the beginning of that same year, and subsequently that of her son, awakened her anxiety and ended her indecision. Easter was approaching, and she resolved to apply to the judicious Abbé Le Gris Duval. She slightly exaggerated the preliminaries of religion, the difficulty of its duties, the necessity of an extraordinary ordeal. We venture—looking not so much to her praise as to the profit of some who may read—to lift a corner of the sacred veil: “Thou, O my God, hast permitted my transient presence in this world, whither we are summoned for a brief and painful journey. At its end we shall return to thee. How wilt thou then receive me, when I tremblingly present before thy holy tribunal the story of a life almost empty of good works? Shall I dare plead before thee those feeble virtues for which foolish men extolled me, knowing not that they were unaccompanied by sacrifice? Shall I boast that I was virtuous, and have thee remind me how happy I have been?

Can I dilate on trifling charities which cost me no privations? Shall I say that I did not hate my enemies, when thou didst permit my heart to be entirely occupied with gentler feelings? What would become of me, wert thou to reproach me with having been puffed up with my felicity? wert thou to tell me that I was proud of having been so happy as a daughter, wife, and mother? Ah, then I should bitterly remember that I had neglected to give thanks to my Creator for all the blessings he had bestowed on me!" But the Abbé Duval answered in his own simple, persuasive tones, "You say you are happy. Why, then, distress yourself? Your happiness is a proof of God's love towards you. And if, in your heart, you truly love him, can you refuse to respond to the divine benevolence? Religion, save in peculiar cases, demands a life of action. It is easier, believe me, to yield the heart to love and peace in retirement than to serve God in the world. To succeed in the last-named career is a work of genuine piety. Engrave upon your conscience this fundamental truth — that religion demands order above all things, and that since the institutions of society have been allowed and consecrated, there is encouragement for those duties by the performance of which they are maintained. . . . But especially banish from your mind the error that our pains alone are acceptable to God. A general willingness to bear trial is enough. Never fear but life and time will bring it. Dispose yourself beforehand to resignation, and meanwhile thank God incessantly for the peace that pervades your lot."

These wise words calmed her mind, and by them it is probable that she ultimately regulated her inner line of

conduct. These humble prayers of Mme. de Rémusat recall others equally thrilling by Mme. de Duras. We love to hear the gentlest and the most unquiet souls declare their longing for the self-same port. But I must pause, my intention having been to approach this subject on its more fathomable side, and to recommend to the reader's careful study one of the most earnest, the most refined, the most intelligent, and most docile minds, bequeathed by the old social order to the new.

Amid a variety of well-sustained characters, amid critics, literary historians, and biographers, it has seemed well to me to preserve some record of one whose motto might have been to introduce as far as possible, and fix for the first time in literature, what previously had had no footing there — a knowledge of the world derived from actual experience.

June 15, 1842.

VIII.

MADAME DE KRUDENER.¹

IN those of our contemporaries whose productions have led us to a minute study of their characters, it is sometimes interesting to determine at what point the traits of previous ages predominate; to what social epoch it would be natural to refer them as to their true time. Speculations of this sort have their advantage if not carried too far; just as a picture is best appreciated by receding a little, and viewing it from different points, or causing it to be turned, raised, or lowered by degrees, until a true and deep perspective is attained. If, for instance, we have found that Mme.

¹ As a biography, this simple *pastel*, which deals with Mme. de Krüdener's mind and character, rather than with the facts of her life, is doubtless very imperfect. A friend of ours, M. Charles Eynard, who has already given us a biography of the celebrated physician Tissot, has long been preparing a complete history of Mme. de Krüdener. Private information, original letters, nothing, will be wanting to the perfection of his work, especially in its religious portions; and we would gladly expedite its appearance in print (1846).

Since the above note was written, M. Eynard's *Life of Mme. de Krüdener* has appeared, and furnished occasion for an article on our part, rectifying and correcting the author upon more points than one. The reader is referred to our *Derniers Portraits*, the present sketch being left in its original form.

de Souza was purely of the eighteenth century, although her days were prolonged into our own, it has been equally evident that Mme. de Duras, while representing the finest aspect of the Restoration, did also, by virtue of her life, her elegant writings, her passionate reaction in favor of Christianity, and her death, recall some of the most affecting personal histories of the seventeenth century. And so to-day, as we approach Mme. de Krüdener, crowned with her mystic aureole, enveloped in a shining cloud, and smiling upon us from amid its dim white radiance, our thoughts and conjectures are at once carried back beyond our own and the two preceding centuries, and we do not hesitate to assign her a still earlier date. We see in her a mediæval saint — a saint of the north and of the thirteenth century, some Elizabeth of Hungary, or sister to the grand master of the chevaliers *porte-glaive*. As such, — drawn Rhine-ward from the depths of her native Livonia, and long involved in the delights of the court, after inspiring with song the most illustrious minnesingers of the day, and herself composing a romance-poem in the character of a poet of the Wartburg (or, perhaps, in emulation of our own Chrestien of Troyes, or some other famous French troubadour, singing in what was then the most delectable of all languages), — she would have turned at last to penitence and God, renounced the flatteries and illusions that beset her, preached to Thibaut, consoled under calumny and converted Blanche, entered some order, which she would have sustained and reformed, and, like another Saint Clara in the train of some Francis of Assisi, would have drawn the people after her in crowds, and communed with the birds in desert places.

This, in short, is what Mme. de Krüdener would have been had she been able to fulfil her destiny. Instead, she was merely a charming novelist, and afterwards an *illuminée* at whom we can but smile. She missed the natural sequel to her part—the willing and entire consecration of the remnant of her days to God, to the work of exhorting to holiness, to the salvation and regeneration of the world. But where was the remedy? She was born fully as late as the middle of the eighteenth century. The descendants of the Teutonic order had become Lutherans. A Lutheran, therefore, and also the wife of an ambassador, she had first to make trial of a worldly life, of scepticism and pleasure; and when she had escaped from these, and when the blaze of public events had kindled the fervid soul within her fragile body, and convinced her that the hour was come in which to prophesy, to smite and heal by turns, she found that few would hear her, and that she was like the barren prophetess of Ilium in ashes. Those, even, whom her rapid and stirring eloquence had arrested for a moment, like the light dust raised by the electric cloud, relapsed when she was gone; and she herself—without fixed order, discipline, or tradition, borne aloft by the hot breath of calamity, catching only broken glimpses of the future, and soon losing trace of it altogether—perished in the distant Crimea, vainly, ineffectually, a snow-flake driven by the northern wind, a flash, a cry amid the raging storm, and nothing more.

The latest period at which Mme. de Krüdener could possibly have found full employment for her faculties, and a perfectly congenial development, was the close of the sixteenth or the beginning of the seventeenth

century. She would then have been able, like Saint Theresa, and, at a later period, Mme. de Chantal, to lean for support against one of the firm pillars of the great and as yet unshaken edifice of Catholicism. She would have opened a new monastic route in the direction already indicated by saintly careers. In her dark and dizzy moments she would have had wise and experienced doctors of the soul at hand — a Saint Francis de Borgia, a venerable Peter of Alcantara, a Saint Francis de Sales. It would not have been well for her to come later, not even in the days of the adorable Fénelon, who would have concurred too entirely in her opinions, and, it may be, fostered her chimeras.¹ But in our time what was she? Where were her guides? A whispering reed shaken by all conflicting winds, from whom could she receive the gentle breath of speech? I seek, but see not at her side, the shade even of a Fénelon. She has none but chance apostles. Plied with questions, pressed for her opinion on means and ends, symbol and legitimate tradition, she pauses; in the fulness of her soul she finds herself at fault, and turns inquiringly towards M. Empeytas.

But for us, who are to consider her chiefly with reference to her authorship of an exquisite book, her character is sufficiently rounded, and her destiny is the more romantic for being incomplete. Since she was not a saint, *Valerie* must remain her principal title to distinction, and, whether she will or no, the central achieve-

¹ No more ought Mme. de Krüdener to have lived too early in the thirteenth century, when the mystics were just beginning to preach the "eternal gospel." Her perilous imagination would have encountered one more snare in a system so akin to her dreams.

ment of her life. Let us, then, no longer attempt to remove her, in imagination, to a realm beyond our remotest horizon, but, rather, view her face to face, and discern what, in her actual lifetime, she was permitted to become.

Born at Riga, on the shores of the Baltic, at about the same time that Mme. de Staël was born in France, Mme. Juliana de Krüdener, a daughter of the Baron de Vietinghoff, one of the great noblemen of the land, and member of a family which the Marshal de Munich had recently rendered famous, passed such a childhood as she has tearfully described in the reminiscences of Valérie. She was reared in the midst of wild but picturesque scenery. The lovely little lake, where the wind sometimes scattered the pine-cones from the forest, and over whose waters she gayly guided a fragile boat; the mountain-ash trees, friendly to the birds; the pyramidal firs, peopled with squirrels that admired their own reflection in the mirrored water; the moaning sedges; the moonlight on the white birch-stems, — such were the elements of that always beloved landscape, amid which began her innocent, and even then impassioned, reveries. The refinements of fashionable society soon enhanced the pleasures of her home. The high nobility of the north was, at that time, irresistibly attracted towards Paris, the Athens of art and pleasure. Princes and kings felt it an honor to have made a brief sojourn there, and to have been graduated as wits or free-thinkers in that school. Their ambassadors were themselves among the most indispensable ornaments of French society and philosophy. Witness the distinguished standing of Baron de Gleichen, ambassador from Denmark, and Baron de Creutz, ambassador from

Sweden. The young Livonian came early to Paris, to a continuation of the social experience already begun. She was married, at the age of eighteen, to the Baron de Krüdener, a relative, who, although still young, was somewhat older than herself, and with whom her principal concern seems to have been to paint a slightly idealized portrait of him in the Count, the husband of *Valérie*. Such was, then, the custom in high society. Your husband gave you a definitive name, a position, and a suitable and sufficient maintenance. He desired nothing more, and beyond that point no mention was made of him in the life of a celebrated woman. At most, one caught his profile, or the outline of his back, in some nook of her next romance. M. de Krüdener, Russian ambassador to divers European courts, introduced to them, successively, the subject of this memoir, who charmed and captivated all hearts wherever she went.

The incidents of her early life already seem very remote. She had attained the age of twenty when the French Revolution began, and had, as yet, no pretensions to literary fame. She was simply a woman of fashion. Of all the emotions which she must have felt and caused, by virtue of her graces, her sensibility, and her wit, the traces are as impalpable as herself. It would be wearisome and vain to seek them elsewhere than in *Valérie*, which gathers, as it were, into a single mirror all their purest rays.

It does not appear that the first outbreak of the French Revolution deranged the life or altered the worldly bias of her who was to be so highly excited by its closing scenes. She was still at that happy age when our own passions, affections, and enjoyments are

sufficiently noisy to make us deaf to all other sounds. The depths of her soul — to borrow an expression from Valérie — were like fountains whose murmur is lost amid the din of the day's activities, and becomes audible only with the approach of evening. In spite of '89, — in spite even of '93, when prophetic and biblical voices had already grown distinct, when Saint-Martin, less obscure than formerly, was writing his *Eclaire*, when De Maistre had hurled his first haughty menaces, and Mme. de Staël, while treating of *sentiment*, had yielded to bursts of potent political eloquence, — Mme. de Krüdener seems still to have seen a perpetual Athens in that Paris which she was finally to treat like Nineveh.

A letter, dated February, '93, and written from Leipsic, to Bernardin de Saint-Pierre, proves only that great personal sorrow — her father's death, and perhaps some secret anguish of another sort — had combined with the climate of Livonia to induce a derangement in her nervous organization, which had continued for the fourteen previous months, but from which she was at length beginning to rally. "The fever," she says, "which consumed my blood has disappeared; my brain is no longer affected as it has been; and the soul agitated by such bitter sorrows, such terrible storms, is once more accessible to hope and the influences of nature. Yes, nature once more affords me sweet comfort and gentle diversion. She is no longer shrouded in a funereal veil. When I recovered my memory and resumed the exercise of my faculties, my thoughts flew to you.¹ How is it with you in this hour of univer-

¹ This expression, as applied to her simple relations with Bernardin de Saint-Pierre, betrays some degree of excitement on

sal calamity?" This word is the only allusion to public events in the whole letter. M. de Krüdener was then ambassador to Denmark. She, with the concurrence of her husband, was residing at Leipsic for the education of her son. But the first glance of her awakened moral sense fell upon the author of Paul and Virginia, the future sister of Valérie, and upon Paris.

She returned thither, after numerous journeyings about Europe, in 1801, at the moment of the declaration of peace and the brilliant restoration of society and letters. She was still quite young, and always beautiful, — a small, pure blonde, — delighting the eye by her grace, with deep blue orbs, and the extremely fair hair peculiar to Valérie. Her voice was low, her speech musical and sweet, the charm of all Livonian women. Her toilets were singularly adapted to her style. She was always composing them in imagination, and some of their secrets have escaped her. Witness the shawl-dance and the ball-costume in that scene where a wreath of blue mallows is placed upon the golden hair of Valérie. So I always see her in my fancy, swiftly entering some splendid *soirée*, to the sound of Garat's music, all heads turning at her airy footfall. It must have been like a vision of Music herself!

It was at Paris, where *René* had just appeared, and at Berlin, whither she soon returned, and where she received, by every courier, boxes of fresh finery, while

the part of Mme. de Krüdener. With a really great writer and poet, we can imagine that she might have shown herself a true daughter of the North, like Lili, the Countess de Bernstorff, and Bettine, those objects of Göthe's enthusiastic regard.

Mme. de Staël was publishing *Delphine*, in France, that Mme. de Krüdener, gathered up her already dim reminiscences, and possibly, also, some pages which she had previously written, and set about composing *Valérie*.

The work appeared in the year XII. (1804), at Paris, and anonymously. While Mme. de Staël, who was then at the height of her celebrity,—having been enthusiastically welcomed by the French school of the eighteenth century, was beginning to turn her attention towards Germany, Mme. de Krüdener, a German, overlooked the already glorious literature of her own country, and had eyes for ours alone. She gave us a gem of a book in this her favorite language, her style being that of the La Fayettees and the Souzas, enriched by a skilful admixture of northern tints. After *Saint-Preux*, *Werther*, and *René*, she was able to retain her individuality, to be both of our country and of hers, and to blend with the genuine French manner something of her own Scandinavian melancholy. Gustave, in the height of his amorous delirium, wrote in his diary, “I have with me a few favorite authors,—the odes of Klopstock, Gray, and Racine. I read them little, to be sure; but they give me dreams of a different life.” Note the order—Klopstock, tempered by Gray, and especially by Racine. In *Valérie*, more than with Mme. de Staël even, the Germanic inspiration, sentimental as it is, finds chastened expression,—is subdued, so to speak, by unflinching good taste, and acquires a certain French unobtrusiveness of form. What might originally have become an ode of Klopstock, we should render by some few tones in the language of Berenice.

Delphine is undoubtedly a work full of power, and passion, and eloquent detail; but, as a whole, it leaves much to be desired, and produces upon the reader, at the time of its perusal, a baffling and confused impression. Those books, on the contrary, which faithfully develop their own leading thought, the reading whereof affects the mind like a single picture finished to its last detail, without slip of the pencil or muddling of the tints, — such books, whatever their size, have a transcendent value as works of art, for they are complete in themselves. I read the other day, in a collection of unpublished thoughts, “The poetic faculty is nothing more nor less than the gift and the art of exhibiting each real feeling in its *flower*, from the royal lily and the dahlia, down to the Easter daisy.” What is here said of poetry may properly be applied to any effort of creative composition, which reflects its author’s *beau-idéal*. *Eugène de Rothelin* is, of course, a picture of smaller dimensions, and, if you will, of narrower range, than *Delphine*; but, in its own style and degree, it is a masterpiece. A rivulet, bright with jewelled waves, slipping between fair banks, over a bed of fine sand and beneath a transparent sky, has its own value to the painter’s eye, and a beauty superior to that of the mighty river unequal in its movement, and, at intervals, turbid and foamy. Referring to the masters, we find that Jean Jacques, in recommending for its subtle heart-analysis the fourth part of the *Nouvelle Héloïse* did not disdain to compare it with the *Princesse de Clèves*, which he had evidently taken for his own model. He was right, and to this very day the latter is, perhaps, a more pleasing, if not a more potent, book than the former. In the same manner *Eugène de Rothelin*, *Va-*

lérie, and *Adolphe* are works whose quality and value are disproportionate to their volume. *Valérie*, moreover, is not inferior, in the order of its ideas and sentiments, to any of our more elaborate fictions, while it excels in the unstudied preservation of natural proportions and a genuine unity. As a whole, like the person of its author, it has infinite grace.

While conforming in parts to an ephemeral and now obsolete taste, *Valérie* has its points of permanent value. In the walks of fiction there have been writers of remarkable talent, who have had but a temporary success; whose productions, though extolled for a time, have been forgotten before many years. Mlle. de Scudéry and Mme. Cottin, despite the wit of the one and the pathos of the other, are quite gone by. No motive, save one of curiosity to discern the style of our mothers' sensibility, would ever induce us to reopen one of their volumes. The same is true of Mme. de Montolieu. *Caroline de Litchfield*, which so captivated us at fifteen, can no more be re-read than *Claire d'Albe*. *Valérie*, on the other hand, holds a permanent place, and is always affecting. It is one of those books which a man may read thrice at different stages of his life.

The plot of the story is very simple, and resembles that of *Werther*. A young man becomes enamoured of his friend's wife. But here, beneath all ideal disguises, we are conscious of a singular realism, lending a life to the narrative which is quite its own. *Werther* would have killed himself if he had not loved Charlotte. He would have died for the infinite, the absolute, — for nature. Gustave dies for the love of *Valérie* alone. The first half of the story is entirely occupied with the origin of his love, its growth, and the pure emotions which help

to fan its flame. Varied scenes and graceful images reveal and illustrate most happily this presence of a stormy, devouring passion, beside an innocent, ignorant friendship. Take the scene at Venice, at the ball in the Villa Pisani. Gustave had not attended, but in passing a pavilion he hears the sound of music, and climbs a great flower-vase to obtain a view through the window. There he sees from without Valérie's marvelous shawl-dance, and, intoxicated by her aspect as she approaches the window, he fastens his lips to the pane which is touched, inside, by her beloved arm. He seems to breathe torrents of fire; but she feels nothing — heeds nothing. What a perfect type of their destinies, — and of many others more or less like theirs! One little sheet of glass between them; but raging flames on the one side and only kindly indifference on the other! So, too, when, on the day of Valérie's *fête*, the Count begins to chide her, Gustave sends a child to bear her his congratulations, and thus remind her husband that she is not to be vexed on such a day. Valérie is moved. She kisses the little one, and sends him back to Gustave, who, stooping to kiss his cheek upon the same spot, finds there — a tear. "O, Valérie," he says, within himself, "tears are the only gift or message possible from thee to me!"¹ This constant sense of

¹ This child, the innocent bearer of a kiss and a tear, reminds us of a little poem by the German minnesinger Hadloub, translated by M. Marmier (*Revue de Paris*, April 2, 1837), and also of that fragment of André Chénier's, probably of Greek origin, "*J'étais un jeune enfant qu'elle était grande et belle.*" Note the variations in the idea and its progress. In André Chénier's imitation of a Greek epigram we have merely the image of the proud beauty and the abashed rivals. In Hadloub, the promi-

separation and sorrow, the nuptial ring which he feels upon Valérie's finger whenever he takes her hand, reapp-

ment idea is that of the grief of the timid and reverential lover, who seeks the adored traces of his lady's lips. The love of chivalry, whose consummation was attained in Petrarch, is here for the first time disclosed. But the tear upon the little cheek in *Valérie* suggests a different thought from either of the others. Here is a version of Hadloub's piece, with this last idea added. It is in the style of the sixteenth century slightly modernized, and we may suppose it to have been versified by Clotilde de Surville, the neighbor of Ronsard and Baif, or, better still, by Mary Stuart: —

Vite me quittant pour elle,
Le jeune enfant qu'elle appelle
Proche son sein se plaça.
Elle prit sa tête blonde,
Serra sa bouchette ronde,
O, malheur ! et l'embrassa.

Et lui, comme un ami tendre,
L'enlaçoit d'un air d'entendre,
Ce bonheur qu'on me défend.
J'admirois avec envie,
Et j'aurois donné ma vie
Pour être l'heureux enfant.

Puis, elle aussitôt sortie,
Je pris l'enfant à partie,
Et me mis à lui poser,
Aux traces qu'elle avoit faites,
Mes humbles lèvres sujettes :
Même lieu, même baiser.

Mais, quand j'y cherchois le bâme
Et le nectar de son âme,
Une larme j'y trouvai.
Voilà donc ce que m'envoie,
Ce que nous promet de jole,
Le meilleur jour achevé.

Or thus, in what is rather a paraphrase than a translation: —

"Come, my child," my lady said:
Swift from me to her he sped,

pears under a new aspect in each affecting scene. The portrait of Valérie is constantly recurring in all sorts of situations and attitudes, smiling, sad, variable, fondly reflected, as it were, in a thousand faithful mirrors.

The second volume is marked by some of the faults peculiar to the Romanesque style. I fancy I can detect the point at which *invention* begins. The winding up of one of these heart-histories, founded upon memory, is hardly ever natural. They are half, or, perhaps, three fourths true; but they must be drawn to an imaginary conclusion, and it requires extreme care to prevent them from assuming an air of improbability. The hero must die to all intents and purposes, whereas, in reality, he is living, half cured, at Baden or Geneva. There is a scene in the second part, where Gustave, in a per-

Nestled near her lovingly;
O'er his golden hair she yearned,
And his rose-bud mouth upturned,
Softly kissed — alas, for me!

Even he, his small arms twining
Round her neck, seemed half divining
The great bliss to me denied;
I, methought, my all would give
Such sweet welcome to receive
As I enviously eyed.

Straight she left us two alone;
Then I called the little one
To my side, intent to place,
Following her gracious sign,
These adoring lips of mine
Where her lips had left their trace.

Here I thought to breathe the whole
Balm and fragrance of her soul; —
Stooping I beheld a tear!
Suddenly my heart grew light,
Reading there a promise bright,
And a hope of coming cheer.

turbed interview with Valérie, just before he is to leave her, suddenly receives a wound in the forehead, while leaning against a window, — a somewhat fallacious and conventional wound, — since the most delicate of lovers could hardly get a hurt in this way. Shortly afterwards he passes, in the night, through the chamber where Valérie is calmly sleeping, and moved by an irresistible desire to gaze on her once more, he hears her murmur, in her dream, the words "*Gustave*" and "*death*." This, again, is the official dream of fiction — a pure sentimental fib of the year 1803. Happily, however, the situation of Gustave soon resumes its reality. One of the finest passages in the book is the scene in the gondola, where Valérie, when slightly startled, lays Gustave's hand familiarly upon her heart, but when seriously alarmed, flings herself into the arms of the Count. "Then, indeed, I realized my utter insignificance, and the gulf that lay between us." When Gustave has gone away alone with his wound into the mountains, when, throughout the autumn months that precede his death, he yields himself desperately to the intoxicating influence of the wild winds and his own reveries, when he becomes almost a René, how distinct an individual he still remains, by virtue of that graceful image of the almond tree, to which he compares himself, — the almond exiled to an ungenial clime, yet bearing flowers for the wind to scatter adown the precipice! What a picture is here of soft and fragile youth on the brink of an abyss! — of a tender, mystical, Ossianesque nature, allied to Swedenborg, prone to self-sacrifice, — of a youth like René, mature beyond his years, who has never known the mood of youth, nor its pleasures, nor its faults, but whom the Count has simply

convicted, in words less severe than those of Father Aubrey to Chactas, of those tender affections which constitute the beauty of our lives, and, collectively, underlie all our virtues and all our sensibility. Gustave, who, at times in his dreamy solitude, is also very like Werther, — who even equals the eloquent and poetic utterances of the latter in that species of hymn where he exclaims, “I wander over the hills perfumed with lavender,” — Gustave maintains his absolute individuality, rejecting the idea of suicide; pious, innocent, and pure, even in his derangement; giving thanks in the midst of his despair. In a word, Gustave actually succeeds in leaving with the reader — as it was his dearest wish to leave with Valérie — “a few tears only.” His memory is of those who endure for a lifetime, and honor such as are formed to cherish them.

M. Marmier, the author of an appreciative article on Mme. de Krüdener, has acutely remarked the presence, in *Valérie*, of certain profoundly religious thoughts, affording glimpses of the future woman beneath the veil of her youthful elegance. I, too, will cite a few prophetic passages.

“Her delicate frame is a flower, which would bow to the lightest breezes; her high, courageous spirit would face death for virtue or for love.”

“‘No,’ I continued, ‘beauty is never overpowering save when it illustrates something less transitory than itself; when it turns the thought upon those things which will constitute the enduring charm of life when the brief moment of seduction shall have passed away. The soul must discern it when the senses have grown dull.’

“‘You know, my friend,’ said Gustave, ‘that I can-

not help loving men. In general I believe them to be estimable. Were it otherwise, would not society have been subverted long ago? Order subsists in the universe; therefore virtue is stronger than vice. But the *great world*, the class that wealth, ambition, and grandeur separate so widely from the rest of humanity, — the world of fashion, — seems to me like an arena bristling with lances, where a wound may be apprehended at every step. Scorn, selfishness, vanity, — these natural enemies of whatever is fair and noble, — mount constant guard at the entrance of this arena. They proclaim laws which hamper all those generous and kindly impulses whereby the soul is elevated and made better, and, because better, happier. I have often pondered on the causes of the fact that all the denizens of this great world come finally to detest each other, and almost always die calumniating life. There are few villains; those whom conscience does not restrain, society does. Honor — the haughty and fastidious offspring of virtue, — honor keeps the avenues of the heart, and repels low and base actions, as the native instincts repel atrocious ones. Taken separately, have not all men some virtuous qualities? Whence comes, then, this throng of injurious vices? Is indifference to good the most dangerous of all immoralities?"

It is evident that Mme. de Krüdener here substitutes her own experience for that of Gustave, and these sentences have all the gravity of her subsequent predictions. The sin against which she here testifies is that, not of the great world merely, but of the whole world; it is that sin of Pilate which Dante punished with a tepid inferno, and which, in our own day, so many gen-

erous innovators, beginning with herself, have grown weary of denouncing.

The style of *Valérie*, like the scenes which it portrays, takes at times a false coloring from the prevalent sentimentalism of the day. It is not agreeable to have the Count send, for his son's grave, a tablet of Carrara marble, — "rosy as youth, and veined with black like life." But these faults of taste are rare, and so are certain vicious idioms, which might be corrected by one stroke of the pen. As a whole, the style of this delightful book is excellent, inclining slightly to severity. It has harmony, rhythm, vivacity of movement, and a perpetual and perfect command of the French idiom.

The success of *Valérie* in the highest French and German circles was prodigious. In that mass of interminable rubbish entitled "*Mélanges militaires, littéraires, et sentimentales*," by the Prince de Ligne, we find a continuation of *Valérie*, which is merely a burlesque by that man of wit, too much addicted to fashionable scribbling. The fascinating Princess Serge Galitzin having, as he says, been unable to sup with him because she was so afflicted by the perusal of *Valérie*, he was fain to remove that obstacle for the morrow by sending her a consoling sequel, in which Gustave returns to life. It is a parody whose slight flavor has long since evaporated. Moreover the poetical world of Germany cherished a grudge against Mme. de Krüdenner for deserting her native language and adopting ours, — even Göthe having expressed his regret that a woman of so much talent should have gone over to France.

However, the Teutonic movement of reaction against France, or at least against the man who held France in

his hand, was soon to gain the support of Mme. de Krüdener, and hasten the adoption of her ultimate character. Even in *Valérie* there is a trace of hostility to the first consul, where the Count alludes to those pictures and statues which must be seen beneath their own skies, in Italy itself, and which it would be preposterous to remove. After the murder of the Duke d'Enghien her dislike became indignation, and her residence in Berlin, her intimacy with the Queen of Prussia, and the events of 1806, completed the work. It must have been, I think, at about this time in Sweden, in the midst of a still brilliant existence, but at the age when youth is flying beyond recall, that a revolution was wrought in the mind of Mme. de Krüdener. "A ray of divine grace" — to use her own words — had touched her, and she embraced religion, but with a lingering admixture of human motives, and not yet in the positive and prophetic character which she afterwards assumed. In the second volume of Mlle. Cochelet's¹ *Memoirs* there occurs, amid pages of platitudes, an admirable letter, which decisively indicates the point to which this marvellous soul had then advanced. She had not begun to prophesy, but she already besieged her friends with the zealous exhortations of a saintly concern. Her Christian influence over the

¹ The *Semeur* for October, 1843, devotes two articles to Mme. de Krüdener, which naturally dwell upon her religious and mystical side. We ourselves had treated this aspect of her character seriously, but the worthy author of these articles regards it with intense solemnity, and reproves us severely for our one faint smile. He cites the letters to Mlle. de Cochelet — not merely this of 1809, but others from the same volume. The curious in this matter will find them there.

Queen of Prussia, her boundless devotion to that sad and heroic sufferer, and the blessed consolations and heavenly hopes which she imparted, are sufficiently well attested. It seems that she had even then composed other works, which were never published. She quotes, in this letter to Mlle. Cochelet, a certain *Othilde*, in which she had attempted to portray the chivalrous piety of the middle age. "O, how you would enjoy this book!" she naively exclaims. "I had help from Heaven in writing it,—and this is why I dare affirm that it has beauties." In thus reverting to the mediæval era,—to the pious days of the Teutonic crusaders,—Mme. de Krüdener seems instinctively to have sought her native sphere.

The great Tasso, who, like our heroine, had a sensitive imagination, and was subject to illusions, might, I should think, have furnished her some harmonious tints for the picture which she essayed to paint; and the colors in which this *Othilde* was conceived and portrayed were, I fancy, those of a baptized Clorinda.

Mme. de Krüdener spent these years of her transition state in wandering over Germany,—now at Baden, where she experienced reactions towards the world, now visiting the Moravian Brotherhood, now listening at Carlsruhe to the *illuminé* Jung Stilling, or preaching with him to the poor.¹ She struggled to rise higher,—to free herself more and more from the ideas of those whom, in her new phraseology, she styled "the men of the torrent;" but she altered less than she supposed.

¹ Some details of Mme. de Krüdener's residence in the Grand Duchy of Baden may be read in the introduction to the tenth volume of M. Bignon's History of France under Napoleon. p. 5 et seq.

If it be allowable to say, as some have done, of the conversion of certain gentle souls, "it is love still," — the expression would seem to have been framed on purpose for her. Into these new ways of hers, which, following Plato, she denominated the "soul's royal route," she brought all the sensibility and imaginative tenderness of her earlier mood, and all the fascination of her earlier manner. Her inexhaustible desire of pleasing was transformed into a vast need of loving, or, rather, it never deserted her.¹

The events of 1813 disclosed in complete and luminous outline the mission which Mme. de Krüdener imagined herself to have received; and that movement of regenerated Germany which produced so many enthusiastic warriors, national poets, and eloquent pamphleteers determined her rank also as the evangelical Velléda and prophetess of the North. Aside from the peculiarities of her religious character, what specially distinguishes the part played by Mme. de Krüdener from

¹ We are reminded of the following anecdote. A distinguished man, who visited her often in the years succeeding her conversion, was smitten with the charms of her daughter, who was like her, only young. At last he opened his heart, and spoke to the mother of the hopes he had dared to cherish. Mme. de Krüdener, during his long and somewhat embarrassed statement, had listened in silence, or mechanically answered, "Yes," but when the name of her daughter was at length pronounced, she suddenly fainted. She thought he had been speaking of herself. However, if we would fairly appreciate the remnant of facile romance which lingered with Mme. de Krüdener in the first years of her conversion, and also the perfect propriety which she always preserved amid her worldly inconsistencies, we must not forget the peculiar mingling in her character of Livonian levity and Livonian purity, which explains the whole.

that of other Teutonic enthusiasts, is her strong reliance upon the extreme North, — upon Russia, or, as she says, the people of the North Wind, — all which she reconciles in her heart with an ardent love of France. Her excited imagination seeks that whereby civilization is to be renewed and regenerated, beyond the confines, even, of ancient Germany, in what was once an ice-bound desert, but has now, in her view, become the reservoir of lost purity. What she invokes, and depicts by contrast in her visions, is the reverse and counterpart of Attila's irruption — a northern invasion for the salvation of the world.

She passed, during the year 1814, from Paris to Switzerland, thence to Baden and the valley of Lichenthal, where the poor whom she had fed and comforted thronged her footsteps; thence again to Alsatia and Strasburg, where she witnessed the tragical but Christian death of the prefect M. de Lézai-Marnésia,¹ and afterwards to the village of the Banc-de-la-Roche in the Vosges, enlightened and leavened by the spirit of Oberlin. All that she saw became part of her hallucination, and increased it. She had, as yet, no personal acquaintance with the Emperor Alexander, al-

¹ Adrien, Count de Lézai-Marnésia, celebrated as a political writer, and exiled, on the 18th of Fructidor, for his open opposition to the Directorial government, was connected by marriage with the Beauharnais family, and subsequently found a powerful protector in Josephine. In 1806 he was appointed prefect of the district of the Rhine and Moselle, and in 1810 prefect of the Lower Rhine. His administration was a model of mildness and justice, and greatly enhanced the prosperity of Strasburg. He was thrown from his carriage in the streets of that city, dragged for some distance at the heels of the horses, and so frightfully injured that he died on the 9th of October, 1814. — TR.

though she had already named him the Universal Deliverer, and the White Angel, in contradistinction from the Black Angel, Napoleon. The mere thought of the latter — his very shade — would induce, whenever mentioned, the sacred vertigo of the priestess. She foretold to all she met his escape from the Island of Elba, and the calamities that would be unchained thereby. She had fixed her mind upon the year '15, and assigned to that near date the approaching catastrophe, and subsequent regeneration of the earth.

1815, since it partially justified her predictions, increased her faith and realized her dream of political influence. She had seen the Emperor Alexander in Switzerland, just before the Hundred Days, and had found in him a docile nature. The prince in question had already been compared to the other Alexander and to Cyrus. She went farther, and compared him to Jesus Christ. She was perfectly sincere, no doubt; but a lingering remnant of address, of the world's insinuating flattery, is perceptible here, and it did her no harm. Her ascendancy from the first was immense. As soon as Alexander arrived in Paris, she became his constant adviser.¹ Several times each day he used to quit the Elysée-Bourbon by a garden gate, and visit her at her

¹ In 1814 Alexander had been under the influence of his excellent tutor, General de La Harpe — an influence purely liberal, with the liberality of '89 and the year III. In 1815, when he passed under the sway of Mme. de Krudener, he seemed far less liberal to our French patriots, — to M. de La Fayette, for instance, who notes the metamorphosis in his *Memoirs*. Yet even then, in his second phase of charitable, Christian mystic, how much more of the love of freedom he displayed, than was the case when that mood, too, had passed away!

lodgings, where they united in a prayer for spiritual illumination. She confessed to a friend at that period, that it was sometimes difficult for her to repress a thrill of vanity, when she reflected that she was all-powerful with the most powerful of sovereigns. Early in September of that year, a grand review of Russian troops was held in Alexander's presence, on the plains of Vertus, in Champagne. Mme. de Krüdener, with her party, her daughter, her son-in-law, and her spiritual director, the young minister Empeytas, had taken rooms in the chateau Mesnil, close by. In the morning the emperor's carriage was sent for her, and the honors paid by Louis XIV. to Mme. de Maintenon in the camp of Compiègne did not surpass the veneration with which the conqueror treated her. It was not the granddaughter of his favorite subject, Marshal Munich, it was an ambassadress of Heaven, —whom he received and conducted into the presence of his armies. Bare-headed, — save for a straw hat, which she laid aside at pleasure, — her fair hair parted and falling over her shoulders, with a few stray curls gathered up and fastened in the middle of her forehead, clad in a long, dark robe, confined, after the fashion of the day, by a simple girdle, and rendered elegant by her manner of wearing it, — such was the aspect of our heroine on this occasion; so she arrived upon the plain at dawn; and standing upright while prayer was offered, she confronted the prostrate troops like a new Peter the Hermit. She wrote and published at the time, under the title of the Camp of Vertus, a little pamphlet on this imposing ceremony. The depth of her emotion and the magnificence of her desires are better expressed in her own language than by any interpretation of ours.

“Who then present¹ in the plains of Champagne but would have said that he beheld the defeat of Attila? Has another rod been broken? . . . There has never been but one crime — that, namely, of desiring to do without the living God. Happy Alexander! How fully must the vast desire of thy heart have been answered, when thou sawest, on that heavenly day, in those plains, where, six centuries ago, in presence of a king of Navarre,² a hundred thousand Frenchmen beheld, by the glare of funeral torches, the torture of four and twenty heretics, — when thou sawest there, I say, a hundred thousand Russians doing homage to the religion of love! Ah, who that saw that divine day but shared in all our hopes? Who but thought, as he beheld Alexander beneath the great banners, of all the triumphs of faith and all the lessons of charity? Who dared doubt the reality of inspiration from on high? Who but said with the apostle, ‘The former things are passed away; lo, all things are become new?’

“And who but felt the need of something new in the midst of so many ruins? Men preëminent by their sagacity discerned this day in the light shed over it by

¹ Here we have a solecism in language. To be present (*assister*) is never used absolutely. The author of *Valérie*, after she became a seer and a divine instrument, grew very careless in her style. Saint Paulinus, after he was converted, allowed, and in fact imposed upon himself, all manner of inaccuracies in his verse.

² Probably Thibaut de Champagne, who was concerned in the severities against the Albigenses, the Jews of Orleans, and the Shepherd Boys. There is a tradition in that district of the torture of twenty-four heretics, who perished upon Mount Aimé, which overlooks the plains. Until within a few years a tower has marked the spot.

the majestic Scriptures. Nature confided it to her observers. Science doubted. Politics, overwhelmed with shame, foresaw in it the day of destruction. . . .

"Yea, all, whether rejoicing in the great secret, as yet veiled like Isis, or trembling with apprehension lest the veil of the future should be rent,—all have looked to this epoch either with confidence or dread. . .

"What heart, in view of these things, has not throbbed for thee also, O France! once so great, and destined to arise yet greater from thy disasters?—France, who hast banished the Almighty from thy councils, and then seen the arm of flesh, although stayed upon empires, fall trembling, and relapse into impotency. . . .

"Say to the astonished peoples that the French have been chastised for their glory. Say to the men without a future that the dust which is whirled aloft returns to the earth, and is mingled with its graves. . . .

"And thou France of the olden time, ancient heritage of the Gauls, daughter of Saint Louis and of so many other saints, who shed upon thee everlasting benedictions, home of chivalry whose dreams have entranced the universe,—arise intact, for thou art living and immortal! Thou art no captive in the chains of Death, like those who have reigned or served in the domains of Evil only."

She ends by pointing to the cross left on the spot like a stately altar, the rallying-point of all, which seems to say, "Here Christ was adored by the heroes and the army dear to his heart; and here the people of the North Wind will require the happiness of France."

These pages clearly show how Mme. de Krüdener conceived the mission of the Holy Alliance; but her

vision, as well as the momentary dream of Alexander, was soon brought to confusion, and vanished before the conflicting interests and positive ambitions of those who made light of such noble chimeras. The species of triumph achieved by Mme. de Krüdener at the camp of Vertus marks the highest point, the bright culmination, so to speak, of her influence. A feeling of serious alarm began to be manifested, and attempts were made to alienate the emperor from her, and to insure his seeing her less frequently. After Alexander had quitted France, Mme. de Krüdener's powers rapidly declined, and the pious veneration she had excited in his mind ended in aversion, and even persecution.

Those who seriously believe in the intervention of Providence in the affairs of this world should not judge too superciliously the mission and the attempt of Mme. de Krüdener. It is certain that 1815 was a decisive epoch; and to religious minds it may well have appeared that the crisis was grave enough to demand a mystical witness and a prophet. Mme. de Krüdener herself was not so much deceived about the importance of 1815 as about its anticipated consequences. In these moments of universal crepitation, it may, I fancy, occasionally come to pass that rapid glimpses of the ideal hidden behind this sensible cosmos are revealed to the eyes of some, causing such to believe its advent near. But the rift soon closes, and the eye which for an instant had seen clear and far, still believing in the vanished radiance, is deceived and filled with its own light only. The mistake of Mme. de Krüdener has been the misfortune of many souls. It was merely that of conceiving, at a certain awful and critical juncture in human affairs, the blessed solution which a truly great

man might have effected. But the great man did not appear, and the prophet of his mission remained a simple visionary. We too are dreamers; and do we not daily repeat, "How would it have been in 1830, if we had had a great heart at the helm? If the noble and interesting but fragile Alexander had been a veritable Charlemagne, a monarch equal to his fortune, Mme. de Krüdener had been more than justified; but, in that case, would she have been necessary? Her crowning delusion lay in the belief that thoughts like hers may be suggested or infused, where they have not occurred spontaneously.

After all, what Mme. de Krüdener did was merely this: in her own peculiar fashion, and in language vaguely biblical, but moved by a new and keen sense of apprehension, she long ago, from the very midst of the political hurricane, discerned and decried that plague of modern scepticism, indifference, and spiritual destitution, which, with more or less of authority, genius, extravagance, and personal risk, has been proclaimed, palliated, aggravated, deplored, and attacked, in turn, by all those who have been variously aiming at a grand regeneration of the world — by Saint-Martin, de Maistre, Saint-Simon, Ballanche, Fourier, and La Mennais.

Aside from Mme. de Krüdener's political influence at Paris in 1815, her purely religious action was extremely transitory, but powerful and impressive while it lasted. All who approached her were, to some extent, subjugated by the charm of her address, and caught the fragrance of her rich and open soul. Of this many examples might be adduced. Mme. de Lé-zai-Marnésia, a beautiful young woman, who had seen

her husband die a frightful death at Strasburg, fled in her anguish to Mme. de Krüdener, and shared her mattress nightly, in the hope of recovering, through her, communication with the lost one, he having already appeared to her more saintly and spiritual friend. In the chateau which she occupied near the camp of Vertus, all the persons about Mme. de Krüdener assumed more or less of her habits of exhortation. Her daughter and son-in-law preached to the family of the aged gentleman with whom they lodged; her very maid preached to the old castle domestic. Some casual expression, let fall no matter where or upon what subject, served as a text, and a conversation, whether it were being held at the castle entrance, or on the staircase, or in the doorway of a room, was transformed into a sermon. Yet the species of respect and admiration she inspired counteracted the impression produced by her surroundings. Many a Parisian scoffer, going to hear her in the great drawing-room in the Rue Saint-Honoré, which was open to all, returned, if not convinced, at least thoroughly subdued by her personal magnetism. Those of her familiar acquaintances who felt themselves capable of resisting her doctrines while in her presence, fell into something resembling her own strain of exhortation as soon as she was away. There was a peculiarly admirable quality, a kind of overflowing plenitude, in her eloquence, when she spoke of the sorrows of the great. "Ah! but I have dwelt in palaces," she said to one young girl, a worthy listener; "and if you did but know the trouble and anguish they conceal! I never see one without feeling a pang at my heart." But when she spoke to the poor of those miseries of the rich, which even their own do not surpass, her words

possessed a special and sovereign efficacy. Once, at Paris, having been earnestly solicited by a good man, M. de Gerando, she made her way, with the permission of the prefect of police, into the prison of Saint Lazarus, and there found herself face to face with the very dregs of society. She spoke to those amazed and soon deeply-affected women. The corruption of the great was laid bare. She smote her breast. She confessed herself as great a sinner as they all. She spoke to them of that God, "who," as she often said, "had snatched her from the delights of the world." She continued for hours, producing an unlooked-for and ever-increasing effect. There were sobs and bursts of gratitude. When she left, the doors were besieged, and the corridors double lined. They made her promise to return, to send them good books. But other emotions supervened, and she never went again. It is this inconsequence in action which makes us sensible of Mme. de Krüdener's lack of fixed order and discipline, and even of definite doctrine.

Many a time, when plied with questions concerning that doctrine, when pressed to declare its source and adduce its proofs, when her mystical utterances were met by the inquiry, "Who are you? whence come you?" she was content, after the first few words, to make a gesture towards Empeytas, who replied, "I will explain all that presently;" and then the wind of inspiration veered, and the explanation was never given.

In the acts of her life, and their results, the same vacillation was apparent. She might, perhaps, have saved Labédoyère,¹ if she had obeyed her first thought;

¹ Charles Angelique François Huchet, Count de Labédoyère, a brilliant but unfortunate French officer, distinguished for his

but different suggestions were offered in turn; her inspiration was at the mercy of the last person whom she saw; and one of these persons, an enemy of Labédoyère, was careful to remain with her until just before the hour of the emperor's visit, by which time her merciful and kindly impulse had cooled, and was effectually resisted.

Her feelings and imagination were under no restraint. Her self-deception in matters of fact was profound, and sometimes amusing. One day, in the year 1815, she said to some one who came to see her in the evening, at the hour of prayer, "Great works are being accomplished. All Paris is fasting." And her friend, who had just come from the Palais Royal, where he had seen everybody at dinner, tried in vain to undeceive her. A trait very characteristic of one who, when a woman of the world, was always fancying that some Gustave or other had died for the love of her.¹

It is interesting to inquire what were, in 1815, the relations of *Mme. de Krüdener* with certain celebrated individuals whose minds should have been congenial with her own on more points than one. *Mme. de Staël*

personal bravery in some of Napoleon's most famous battles. While remaining faithful to the latter in his misfortunes, and one of the first to join him on his return from Elba, he yet had the courage to protest in person against the emperor's system of reckless usurpation. He lingered unaccountably in Paris after Napoleon's final overthrow, and was one of the earliest victims of the Restoration, having been shot in the plain of Grenelle, August 19, 1815. — *Tr.*

¹ "What!" said some one whom she had informed that a certain young man was dead; "why, he is at Geneva!" "My dear friend," she exclaimed, with all her natural grace, "if he is not dead, he is not much better."

admired her as the author of *Valérie*, but the genius of the former was too decidedly political and historic for her to sympathize with our heroine in her high prophetic vein, and she rather made light of it. Not so Benjamin Constant. He saw much of Mme. de Krüdener in 1815, and found in her presence consolation for his sorrows, and food for certain cravings in his soul. The political vicissitudes which the illustrious publicist was then enduring are well known; his religious emotions were correspondingly agitated. They returned to the charge, and made, as it were, a last, desperate struggle on the extreme confines of his youth. Other secret troubles he had, which were gathering into a final storm. To Mme. de Krüdener he repaired in these days to seek a little rest, and remembrance in her prayers; Adolphe always the same beside a regenerated Valérie. We are kindly allowed to quote a few sentences containing a precious picture of their friendly relations. "I saw Mme. de Krüdener yesterday," writes Benjamin Constant,¹ "at first with other company, afterwards for a few hours quite alone. She produced upon me an unparalleled effect, which was heightened by a circumstance that occurred this morning. She sent me a manuscript, with the request that I would transmit it to you, and to you alone. I should like to read it with you, for it has done me good. It contains nothing very new. The joys and needs experienced by all alike cannot well seem new; but more than one of its passages went straight to my heart. It tells some trivial, but to me most poignant, truths. When I read these not very remarkable words, 'Many a time I have envied

¹ To Mme. Récamier.

those who toil with sweat of the brow, who add one task to another, and lie down at the end of life, all unconscious of the mine of unexplored wealth man bears within him! Many a time I have said to myself, "Be like the rest,"—when I read these words, I say, I burst into tears. The memory of a wasted, stormy life, which I have dashed with a kind of deliberate rage against every rock I encountered, came over me with a force I cannot describe."

Sad and striking incongruity! Even while bewailing, in the presence of one whom he loved and admired, a certain habitual harshness which he would fain have softened, he was constituting himself the organ of a mystical sanctity, and attempting to propagate the same. He also wrote, "I tell myself that I must needs be what I am, else I could not lead you into a sphere of thought which I myself, unhappily, have not fully entered; the lamp, however, diffuses light without seeing its own. . . . I had passed the day alone, and only went out to see Mme. de Krüdener. Excellent woman! She does not know all, but she sees that I am consumed by a fearful anguish, and she kept me three hours, in the hope of soothing me. She told me to pray for those who had made me suffer; to offer my own sufferings, if need were, in expiation for them." And again: "I am a harp broken by the storm, but resounding as it breaks with a harmony destined for your ear. . . . I am fated to enlighten you while preying on myself. I want to believe; I try to pray." Unfortunately for Benjamin Constant, the transports which awoke at Mme. de Krüdener's side, and attained their height as these two recited the Lord's Prayer together, were not of an abiding nature, and he soon relapsed into a mood

of captious irony and general disgust with the world, whence he was but fitfully aroused by the working of his noble civic passions.¹ Quitting France after 1815, Mme. de Krüdener travelled through several of the German states in succession, stirring up their inhabitants by the sound of her voice, but soon receiving leave to withdraw from their respective governments. M. de Bonald having ridiculed her on this account in a facetious article published in the *Journal des Débats* for March 28, 1817,² a friendly pen—none other, it may be, than Benjamin Constant's own—defended her in the *Journal de Paris* of March 30, reminding the arrogant patrician, that, as a man of family at least, he owed some respect to the granddaughter of Marshal Munich.

Withdrawing presently beyond the echoes of Switzerland and the Rhine valley, the tones of Mme. de Krü-

¹ Under this head of interesting personal relations, we may remark that Mme. de Krüdener knew M. de Chateaubriand at the time of the appearance of *Atala*, in 1801. His famous Memoirs will contain a very affectionate and impressive letter which she addressed to him in Rome, on hearing of the death of Mme. de Beaumont.

² M. de Bonald commences thus: "Mme. de Krüdener was once a pretty woman. She published a fictitious work, possibly of her own composition, under the title, I believe, of *Valérie*. It was sentimental and moderately tiresome. At present she is absorbed in a life of mystical devotion, and in the deliverance of vaticinations which are fictions too, but of another sort." He concludes in the same strain: "I make bold to declare, with the Bible in my hand, that the poor we shall always have with us, were it only the poor in intellect." The anonymous writer in the *Journal de Paris* allows himself to characterize the final play upon words as worthier of Potier or Brunet than of a Christian seriously penetrated with the spirit of the gospel.

dener's voice no longer reach us, and she comes no more within the range of our narrative. Anything further which we might add would be but a monotonous repetition of what has gone before. She published a few small works in Germany, extracts from which may be seen in M. Marmier's notice. University professors printed in detail the conversations they had held with her. In all the latter part of her apostolate, Mme. de Krüdener seems to me not very unlike the numerous sectaries that daily arise in England and the United States of America. The originality of her *rôle* is at an end. Having at last obtained permission to visit St. Petersburg, she was almost immediately banished for declaring in favor of the Greeks, and died in the Crimea, in 1824, while attempting to found a kind of penitentiary. All honor to one who continued to the end, amid all the opprobrium excited by her zeal, an unflinching martyr in the cause of charity!

But, as a mere act of gratitude, it behooves France to cherish the memory of a woman who early fixed her eyes upon her, who adorned her society, adopted her language, enriched her literature; who loved her at all times with a love like that of Mary Stuart; and who, when her whole soul was laid bare in her hour of mystical exaltation, showed that she had conceived no higher mission than that of being to France the Joan of Arc of peace, unity, and mercy.¹

July 1, 1839.

¹ In a different vein from ours, but without malevolence, and with a perfect understanding of his subject, a cousin of Mme. de Krüdener's, the Count d'Allonville, has devoted to her a chapter, which may be consulted in vol. vi., p. 292, of his *Mémoires Secrets*.

IX.

MADAME GUIZOT.

(NEE PAULINE DE MEULAN.)

THERE are certain individuals who bring into this world, and exhibit from their earliest youth, a faculty of acute and sagacious observation, uninfluenced by enthusiasm, aiming directly at the truth, and peculiarly sensitive to all that is weak, eccentric, and absurd. While, for the most part, great minds begin with passion, either by a kind of trustful, graceful, pastoral illusion, or by a misanthropy rebellious and superb, — while to some life opens gay and alluring, as to Paul and Virginia, and to others its aspect is rather stern, sublime, and imposing, as to Emile and to Werther, — the apprenticeship of the early-mature and thoughtful natures which we describe is smoother and less hazardous. They find this world, at the outset, neither merry, nor sad, nor hostile to themselves, but rather, at once, better and worse than so. The majority of men, when youth is passed, revert to a correct appreciation of things. Those who, at the beginning, cherish a confiding and innocent enthusiasm, are taught by their mistakes the knowledge of evil, and often, during their years of mortifying experience, are inclined to assign it too large a place. When M. de la Rochefou-

could had ceased alike to love and to rail, he no doubt laid too great a stress on human malice, his wrath being excited against it still more by his gout and his bad eyes. Those, on the contrary, who begin by taking a very lofty tone with circumstances, who are austere stoics and sombre dreamers before twenty-five, fall back, as life advances, and become more lenient, or, at least, more indifferent. The author of *Werther*, if ever for one moment he resembled his hero, would furnish a beautiful instance of this gradual pacification, whereof it is easy to adduce less doubtful examples. But the essentially critical and moralistic mind does not usually require either great mistakes or direct revelations to secure the complete development and full exercise of its powers. It moralizes instantaneously, instinctively, by virtue of a special gift, and not from motives of weariness and reaction. Boileau had no need to experience strong passion, and endure floods of bitterness, in order to temper his discriminating and incisive verse, and suggest its application to those about him. Little as we know of the life of La Bruyère, I do not believe that even he required great personal trials to enable him to read hearts as he did. This penetrative faculty reveals itself early in those on whom it is bestowed. Vauvenargues seems to have been a sage in his youth. In that illustrious and sober family of moralists, which begins with La Rochefoucauld and La Bruyère, and comprises Vauvenargues and Duclos, Mme. Guizot is our latest author, and, for that very reason, not yet fully appreciated.

Properly speaking, the moralist has a taste and a genius for observing men and things, for taking them

as they come, — no matter how, — and piercing their disguises and sounding their depths. For him there is neither general theory, nor system, nor method. A practical curiosity is his guide. His science is, so to speak, like the botany of the age before Jussieu and Linnaeus — the botany of Jean Jacques. Thus every person he meets, in all his intercourse with society, becomes subject of remark and discrimination. Everything affords a point of view. It is his amusement — nay, it is the exercise of his creative power — to look about him at random, and take concise and piquant note of the actual. Some disagreeable or insignificant individual passes — speaks. He is observed and his likeness seized. The moralist reads a book. From the preface he derives some knowledge of the author, and accepts and contradicts his theory. By the time he has reached the twentieth page, how many reflections have occurred to him! The author would almost seem to have made his volume for his critic's sake. Literary criticism is never anything more than an occasion or point of departure for the moralist. He is present at a theatrical representation. What an opportunity for expatiation or dissent! It is not enough for him to say, "This is good," or, "This is bad;" "I am amused," or, "I am bored." He considers and reconstructs the drama. He reviews the action of the characters, not from the dramatic point of view, but supplying the details of real life. *Tartufe* suggests *Onuphre*. So he proceeds, calmly, but with gusto, deliberately observing and taking notes of many items on many points. As for generalization and the discussion of metaphysical laws, — these things he does not attempt. His is a work of tact, and not of doctrine; his special concern

is with civilized man and social accidents. In the statements he makes he insists upon a few comparisons which, to him, are perfectly obvious, — sure, above all things, that different truths can never contradict one another. La Bruyère strikes me as an excellent model of the moralist when so conceived. I cannot imagine a La Bruyère in our own day. We are said to have freedom of the press; but would a book like La Bruyère's find favor among us? The poor author would be disgraced, I fancy, as often as he should abandon the maxim and betake himself to the consideration of individual instances. The gentlemen of Versailles comprehended raillery far better than do some of our superb moderns. Another and more fundamental reason why La Bruyère would be improbable at the present time is, that we have no conception of some of those faults on which the keen glance of the moralist alights, and which he in some sort discovers. For instance, a word not very frequently employed of late, but which the moralist lived upon in other days, is *fool* (sot). Now, the fact is, that we are no longer very sensitive to the defect which this word implies; and folly, — a spice of folly, — if joined to some degree of talent, has become an instrument of success. A little folly, in connection with genius, is a kind of label which proclaims a man's quality. Besides, we live at an era when the public would rather have a man's character officially announced in advance, than be obliged to discover the same for themselves. But since we have now to speak of an admirable moralist, let us not be too despondent concerning the future of this precious order, which, until lately, had never failed in France. Mme. Guizot herself has somewhere said, that when a repeated and

lasting derangement occurs in any order of things, some gifted person never fails to appear unexpectedly and remedy the defect.

Mme. Guizot has been better known and more frequently classified as an author of remarkable treatises on education, than as a moralist, strictly so called. The two volumes collected under the title of *Conseils de Morale* do, indeed, reveal her in the latter light; but in these her assumption of the character appears, if I may so express myself, less natural and spontaneous than we ascertain it to have been after an attentive study of her genius. Her brilliant *début* as a moralist belongs to a portion of her life which borders upon the eighteenth century, and which has excited less remark than her subsequent labors.

Mlle. Pauline de Meulan was born at Paris, in 1773, and educated in the ideas and habits of what was then the first society. Her father, M. de Meulan, receiver-general for the district of Paris, was in the enjoyment of a large fortune, which he dispensed hospitably and in good taste. Her mother, a maiden of Saint-Chamans, was highly connected, being of an ancient family of Périgord, which was even represented in the crusades. The company that frequented the house of M. de Meulan was much the same as that which visited M. Necker and M. Turgot — MM. de Rulhières, de Condorcet, Chamfort, De Vaines, Suard, &c. M. de Meulan had taken, as a secretary, at a high salary, Collé, on whose *Memoirs* Mlle. de Meulan afterwards passed judgment in the *Publiciste*, and whom, despite his levity, she recognized as very honorable and high-minded.¹ A thoughtful child, tenderly cherished

¹ See Collé's Journal for August, 1751, vol. i. p. 417.

by her mother, intelligent but without marked vivacity, and somewhat sickly, little Pauline passed her early years in a social sphere the stamp of which she gradually acquired, and plainly showed, in after years. It constituted a rare, truthful, carefully executed and permanent background to her experience. But her infancy and her girlhood showed no traces of that enthusiastic sensibility whereof Mlle. Necker, seven years her senior, gave such eloquent proofs. "I have but a vague recollection of *Werther*, which I read when I was young," she remarks, a few years later; and so it was to be with many of the books whose hold upon young minds is usually strongest, but to which her own did not respond. As the Revolution drew near she began to feel its impulse. She took an interest in events, and in the triumph of those opinions, which, as originally developed in '87 and '89, were hers, and those of the world immediately about her. But dissensions were not slow to arise, and the increasing violence of the shocks which ensued, soon cooled her early ardor. The general impression left upon her mind by the Revolution was that of a frightful spectacle, which outraged all her affections and habits of life, although to some extent conformable to her opinions. Perhaps this was why she had no more youth. This ever-present incongruity was to her a kind of sad and oppressive enigma. The self-same cause, at the self-same time, bespoke the approval and excited the revolt of her reason. In this painful strait were quickened the powers of a mind which we shall see issuing thence strong, critical, incisive, most sensitive to discord, prompt to detect the genuine, and swiftly and surely to dissect it from the false.

In these trials, also, her serious mind was attuned to virtue. Her father's death, in the year '90, the ruin of her family, her forced residence at Passy, and her uninterrupted reflections during the hard winter of '94 and '95, caused her to concentrate her moral forces upon the necessities of her nearest friends, and revealed the energy of her character. M. de Rémusat says it was during this long winter, one day, while she was engaged in drawing, that the suspicion occurred to her that she might possess unusual mental gifts.¹ The idea of being able, some day, to employ her talents in the discharge of her sacred obligations, moistened her eyes for a moment with noble tears. She read more, she read slowly. Even in the earlier pages of a book, her fruitful and reflective mind turned readily to her own thoughts, which were excited in multitudes by those of the author. She knew English, and perfected herself in it. That clear, sensible, forcible language became as familiar to her as her own. Old friends of her family, such as MM. Suard and De Vaines, encouraged her first attempts with systematic and watchful kindness. A striking piece, written in 1807, and entitled *Friends in Misfortune*, seems to me to contain some allusions to this her situation in former years. Of course, all the friends of Mlle. de Meulan were not as efficient and invaluable as MM. De Vaines and Suard. The same individuals, who afterwards pitied her so

¹ We shall guard against reproducing the facts which we are pleased to find in M. de Rémusat's notice, detailed with the high-minded delicacy peculiar to himself, and of which he is only too sparing (1836). Since then M. de Rémusat has appealed from the regret here expressed, making manifold display of his powers, with a versatility and acumen all his own.

charitably for having become a journalist, sometimes excited an ironical smile by their forward and futile advice. "Friends, many in number," she used to say, "on whom you cannot rely; a quantity of money to handle, without the power of keeping any; many debts, but no credit; much business, but no profit." She was probably thinking, just then, of her own domestic embarrassments, of that fortune of several millions overtaken by complete ruin, which they say she succeeded in reducing to order, and all claims upon which she met, saving nothing for herself but the consciousness of freedom from debt. During the years when this care was upon her, she displayed remarkable practical ability, and a knowledge of business, whose exercise was, however, always restricted to private life.

Mlle. de Meulan's first literary effort was a romance in one volume, entitled *Contradictions, or, What may Happen*, published in the year VII. She was about twenty-six years old, and for so young an author, and a woman, her *début* strikes me as very remarkable. In the first chapter, the hero awakes on Décadi¹ morning, happy in the thought that he is to be married on that day to the lively and agreeable Charlotte. His servant, Pierre, a kind of Jacques the Fatalist, a discreet and honest man, remarks, according to his wont, as he attires his master, "Well, monsieur, did I not always tell you so?" They repair to the bride's house, find her ready, and thence proceed to the municipality, or hall of the town council, where they were expected. The municipal officer, however, is absent. His wife

¹ Decadi was the tenth and last day of the decade, or period of ten days, which replaced the week in the revolutionary calendar. — TR

has been confined on the previous evening, and he must have his Decadi to make merry with his friends, and celebrate the birth of his child. "To-morrow, then," says everybody; and the party retire slightly disappointed, all except the rival, who attends the wedding as Charlotte's cousin, and who smiles, while Pierre, the optimist, having greatly incensed his master by the repetition of his favorite speech, rejoins, "Who knows?" On the morrow it rains; they are late at the municipality, and find the officer gone. The next day the *fiancée* is summoned to the bedside of an old aunt, who is dying. In short, from Decadi to Primidi, from Primidi to Duodi, from mischance to mischance, the marriage with Charlotte, who is something of a coquette, gets itself constantly postponed,—the hero himself being rather fickle and very irresolute. The situation, which, at first, appears piquant, is prolonged till it becomes uninteresting. The persistent and perpetually recurring joke has a mysterious and preconcerted air. But the idea of choosing as the subject of a novel a complication arising in a great measure out of the republican calendar, and the confusion of Decadi and Primidi, &c.; the capability of laying one's scene in a petty provincial town, haunted by graceful but totally unheroic figures,—bores, coquettes, and men of unstable character,—these things, in a person of her age, argue a decidedly original turn of mind, and a keen sense of the ridiculous, the incongruous, and the unsuitable. In the same manner, the first effort of Despreaux was a satire on the entanglements of Paris. It would be easy to collect from the Contradictions, which might just as well be called the Contrarieties, a number of neat remarks on tattlers and busybodies. There is a

very delicate allusion to the evasions which we practise upon ourselves in different cases. "I cannot say," says the hero, "whether everybody is like me, but when I have been long engaged in any matter of unusual interest, and when the difficulties which beset its successful management have compelled me to regard it in many different lights, I grow cold, and cease to attach any importance to what a moment before I considered indispensable." And, elsewhere, "As always happens, when one is very much occupied with any plan, however unimportant, I forgot, for a moment, all my sorrows." What could a satirical recluse of forty-five say more? Of melancholy and reverie, so called, there is not a trace, save one touching chapter in *L'Ecu de six Francs*, which at once recalls some remarks on Sterne, by Mlle. de Lespinasse. Henriette, who finally displaces Charlotte in the hero's heart, is a fresh, plump little lady of twenty-four, not without her charm. Charlotte, the frail, is droll but fascinating. The unimpassioned hero, odd as one of La Bruyère's characters, who dreams one night the pleasant dream that he is going to marry four wives, becomes tender at the last, when he bursts into tears at the feet of Henriette.¹ The style is good,

¹ Mme. Guizot loved to relate that when, in her girlhood, she attempted this first romance, she studied to secure its success by mimicking certain peculiarities of the spirit of her time; some few, in fact, whose importance she, in her perfect innocence, hardly guessed. She put them in without scruple, as fast as they occurred to her, saying, "It is all for my mother." "If I had suspected more," she declares, "I should have added more, such confidence was inspired in me by the simple words, 'It is all for mother.'" Notwithstanding this pleasant explanation of her motives, the style (or tone) of the Contradictions is, as a

concise, pure, clear, free from objectionable idioms. Once, indeed, she speaks of a person who had never been regarded under a like aspect (*sous un semblable rapport*), one of those forms of expression which neither Voltaire nor Courier could tolerate. M. Suard should not have allowed this to pass. He should have rooted out the only species of fault with which it was afterwards possible to reproach a style, remarkable, otherwise, for its truth and simplicity, and especially for its fidelity to the thought.

We find no more trace, in the Contradictions, of religious sentimentalism, than of any other dreamy and impassioned propensity. The part played by Pierre, with his constant submission to Providence, is marked by a touch of fine and gentle raillery, which is neither very shocking nor very elevating. The excellent Pierre, as we have already said, is a kind of respectable Pangloss, a Jacques the Fatalist, whose acquaintance may be acknowledged. As we pronounce, with all due circumspection, these names, which must needs be slightly offensive and suspicious, let us seize the opportunity of adding, that one of the most distinctive traits of Mlle. Meulan's mind, as well on her first appearance as in those contributions to the *Publiciste* which we are presently to review, is an absence of all false prudery and prim fastidiousness. In the sobriety of her reason and the soundness of her conscience, she traced no factitious and impassible circle about herself. Mlle. de Meulan thought it no condescension to pronounce, upon occasion, a deliberate estimate of Collé. Between a paper on the *Princesse de Clèves* and one

général thing, spontaneous rather than studied, natural and not premeditated.

on *Eugène de Rothelin*, she frankly approached the subject of Louvet's romance, and, without disguising her identity or strongly repressing her indignation, she ridiculed it as a sham picture of manners, convicted it of falsity, and remanded it to the seamstresses, the milliners, the hairdressers, and the lawyers' clerks of the pre-revolutionary period, for whom, without doubt, it was composed. Mme. Roland, who thought the romance *pretty*, and who had searched it with secret pleasure for information about the manners of a class which she detested, would have turned purple on the perusal of Mlle. de Meulan's article; but it would have cured her on the spot.

There is one passage in the Contradictions which shows very plainly how independent was Mlle. de Meulan's thought, and how entirely in all matters she formed her own opinions. It is where Pierre, encouraged by the moderate enthusiasm of his master before the colonnade of the Louvre, remarks, "It is fine, of course; but, with Monsieur's permission, it is thought so because people have to come a good way to see it. For my part, I very much prefer our church, with the variety of faces and figures in its niches, to these columns that are all alike, and signify nothing." Was this judgment on the Gothic, put into Pierre's mouth in the year VII., intended for anything but a lively sally? I should not dare affirm it. But, at a later period, I find Mlle. de Meulan arriving at opinions in matters of poetry equally novel and just, and by virtue of the same correct and independent reasoning. In two articles which appeared in November, 1808, on "The Use of Certain Expressions in Poetry," the critic, taking for her theme a verse of *Baudouin*, in which M. Lemer-

cier has used "horses" instead of "coursers," attempts to determine the conditions under which it is proper to introduce common expressions into verse. In another article, dated March, 1809, on the Christopher Columbus of the same author, who is now so cautious and negative, but was then in the mood to raise all manner of novel questions, she discusses still further the blending of the tragic and the comic. No false scruples, no superstitious tradition, hampers her sagacious logic in this delicate investigation. She does not look at the picturesque side of things. She does not heed the grand effects of dramatic contrast. She does not, I think, make sufficient allowance for the infinite resources of genius, for improvisation in art; but at every word you recognize a person of ideas, of nice and healthful taste, free from prejudice, thorough-going, an enlightened *rationalist* in all things.

Ayton Chapel, which appeared soon after the Contradictions, and which has very much more of romantic interest, seems to me far less significant as a first attempt and presage of the author's future style. Mlle. de Meulan, having undertaken to translate the earlier pages of an English novel — Emily Courtney — presently determined to continue it on her own account, and after her own fashion. English novels, full of incident, emotion, and power, were then very much in vogue; our young author attempted something in the same line, and succeeded. Her imagination helped her in this natural and singularly moving style of composition. Compared with many of the fictitious works of that day, Ayton Chapel appears extremely rational and free from exaggeration and the sentimentalism elsewhere prevalent. The author, who is sympathetic,

but always sensible, controls her characters and her situations, checking the former, and prolonging or cutting short the latter, at her will. This artificiality of arrangement is even too apparent. It tests, and more or less clearly betrays, the unreality of the whole thing. Pretty domestic scenes, family interiors, the effortless consistency of her characters, attest, moreover, that share of the dramatic faculty, that skill in dialogue and stage arrangement, of which Mme. Guizot has given proof in many of her other works—in her *Tales*, in her *Young Student*, and even in her *Letters on Education*; for, to a moderate degree, and so far as may come within the scope of the moralist, she possessed an inventive imagination. Her ideas by no means remained in the maxim state, but readily assumed, even in her own mind, a playful and conversational form. She could produce living characters that were no mere copies, and inform them with a certain activity. The creative gift, when displayed in its marvellous plenitude, she admired above all others. Molière, Shakspeare, and Walter Scott were her three great literary heroes—the only ones whom she actually loved.

M. Suard had established the *Publiciste* some time in 1801. M. Guizot's excellent remarks on the *salon* of this distinguished academician, and the company he received, are directly applicable to the sheet which expressed the views of his clique with moderation, urbanity, and a tone of honest liberalism. M. de Rémusat says that the spirit which animated its contents was that of eighteenth-century philosophy, enlightened or intimidated by the Revolution. The *Décade*, which was soon to become impossible, represented that phi-

losophy in its entirety—its general doctrines embracing politics, religion, literature, and ideology—its last remnant of hopeful and proselyting ardor. The *Journal des Débats* raised at all points the opposite standard. M. Suard, the Abbé Morellet, and their friends who were partisans of the eighteenth century, and not of the Revolution, who stopped at D'Alembert, refusing to advance to Condorcet, and who in their lives remained practically faithful to the habits of thought and the refined tastes of the olden time, discovered that they were not properly represented by the *Décade*, while, at the same time, they were disturbed and outraged to the last degree each morning by the diatribes and the recantations of the *Journal des Débats* and the *Mercur*e. Introduced to the *Publiciste* in the first instance by the friendship of M. Suard, Mlle. de Meulan found a shade of opinion harmonizing very well with her own, and a convenient vehicle for essays of various kinds. For nearly ten years she furnished contributions to this journal on all sorts of subjects—on ethics, society, literature, plays, novels, &c.; and it would be impossible, without a review of her articles, to form an adequate idea of the versatile talent, the fertility of resource, and the apt originality, which she displayed. Sometimes her pieces were anonymous; but she usually signed them with the initial P., and occasionally with the initial R., and a variety of others. Now replying in an assumed character to her own articles, she maintained a controversy with herself, sharply attacking the Geoffroys, the Fiévées, M. de La Harpe, and M. de Bonald; for she had a fondness for polemics, and never spared herself on these occasions. Anon, as opportunity offered, she reviewed and passed judg-

ment on some academic eulogy, or some reprint of an old author. Writers like Vauvenargues, Boileau, Fénelon, Duclos, Mme. de Sévigné, Mme. de La Fayette, Mme. des Houlières, Ninon, Mme. du Châtelet, she avenged of stupid slanders. But whether she briefly characterized Collin d'Harleville, Beaumarchais, Picard, Mme. Cottin, Mme. de Souza, discussed the elegy, or gently lectured Mme. de Genlis, her ardent reason never flagged under its varied activities, nor lost itself in futile phrases. Speaking of the logical faculty as exhibited in Boileau, she herself somewhere says, "In him it was a delicate, sensitive, irritable organ, wounded by a false sense as a fine ear is wounded by a false note, and rising in its wrath the moment it received a shock." Something of this same vivacity and vigilance of reasoning Mlle. de Meulan also displayed during the singularly active period through which we are to follow her. In this her character of literary critic and philosophical partisan she is not sufficiently well known. The two volumes entitled *Moral Counsels* are almost entirely made up of pages extracted from her articles, of original and striking introductions to critiques on one or another long-forgotten comedy of the day—her opinions of the authors being omitted. While glancing, with inexpressible interest, over this large collection,—the pious labor of domestic love,—it has occurred to us to desire that another volume of extracts might be published—a volume more literary in its character than the *Conseils de Morale*, whose contents should simply preserve their primitive stamp, and which might restore to light, or, at least, rescue from utter oblivion, many a nice and accurate estimate, many a minute characteristic which will never be so well described

again when the same themes are under treatment, many which will never be described at all.

The first articles furnished to the *Publiciste* by Mlle. de Meulan were collected and reprinted some time in 1802, in a small duodecimo, which was never offered for sale. They were also inserted in the volumes of *Miscellanies* which M. Suard published at about the same time.¹ It was on this occasion that Mme. de Staël, always prompt to extend an affectionate welcome to nascent merit, wrote to the academician in question, "I have read with infinite pleasure some of the pieces in your *Miscellanies*, and I need not say how far I can distinguish from all the rest those signed with the letter P. But pray tell me if Mlle. de Meulan is indeed the author of the fragment on Vauvenargues, and those on Thibet, the English, &c. They so far transcend the ordinary efforts even of a gifted woman that I fancied I detected your hand in their composition." It must have been after receiving M. Suard's reply that Mme. de Staël wrote to Mlle. de Meulan, making an offer of her friendship, and begging that she would use her as a banker, and give her the preference over others. Mlle. de Meulan accepted only the fragrance of kind feeling which these offers exhaled. In her earlier articles, Mme. de Staël had come up for discussion. Alluding to a sentence in

¹ M. Suard published three volumes of *Miscellanies* in 1803, and two more at a later period, making five volumes in all. In the preface to the two last (1804), he is careful to state that a large proportion of the pieces they contained are by the author who in the earlier volumes had adopted the signature of P. M. de Barante assures me that the most important of these pieces — that, namely, on the History of the French Theatre — is by Mlle. de Meulan.

which the author of *Malvina* — Mme. Cottin — had apparently denied her sex the capability for producing any philosophical work, the critic mentioned Mme. de Staël's recent treatise on Literature, and took occasion to eulogize more than one of its passages, and animadvert on more than one of its censors; while, in her turn, although with great tenderness and reserve, she touched upon certain less satisfactory points. Mme. de Staël — who on this occasion received some such ingenious suggestions as the following, "Care less that your praises should be loud than that they should be harmonious" — was not thereby deterred, as we have seen, from a recognition as honorable to her heart as were the suggestions themselves to the refined and dignified intelligence of Mlle. de Meulan.

Our critic, in the early maturity of her intellect, passed judgment on *Atala*, also, in an article marked by temperate admiration, and observations of the most judicious character. But even while thus paying homage to genuine talent, when enlisted in the cause of religion, Mlle. de Meulan remanded to their proper places both Citizen La Harpe and Citizen Vauxcelles, who had made an article of her own on Fénelon's *Education des Filles* the occasion of delivering, the one before the Lyceum itself, and the other I know not where, mechanical harangues on irreligious fanaticism and some other well nigh exploded platitudes. In a letter to a friend whom she supposed to be pondering a pamphlet on behalf of the philosophers, she wittily demanded, "Why a pamphlet? Is it to prove that Voltaire is a great poet, and *Zaire* a touching composition — or, rather, that the word *philosopher* is not exactly synonymous

with Septembrist?"¹ And so on in this *douairière du Marais* tone, which she greatly affects. "The mania of your time of life," she ends by saying, "is to want to make men hear reason. The experience of mine teaches me that they had better be left to revert to it themselves; that time generally restores them to just and right views; but that justice and right have rarely convinced any one." What a mind is this! how practical, how trustworthy, beginning where other sages end! Patience, and with the lapse of years we shall see it undergoing a marvellous development in the direction of enthusiasm, tenderness, and faith. These well-preserved souls, so chary of passion, have high and warm impulses at the season when those who were more ardent in the beginning are growing apathetic. From beneath their profound reasonings come forth to light their late but noble passions, as the pure wheat of the wise man's last granaries is dispensed when winter and want prevail. So it was with her of whom we speak. She began by assuming the tone of Duclos; she ended by listening to Bossuet. But we will not anticipate.

In those of her early contributions to the *Publiciste* which bear date, Floreal, year X., we find, under the title *Detached Thoughts*, some few of the very purest stamp and deepest significance — ideas at once subtle and comprehensive, very pungent, and yet of wide application. For instance: "We care nothing for brilliant speeches, unless they present some idea which we have never before entertained; nor for tender speeches, unless they recall some emotion which we

¹ One who defended the massacres of September, 1792. — TR

have experienced. The difference is precisely that between a new acquaintance and an old friend." And this other: "Glory is the superfluous part of honor, and, like every other superfluity, it can hardly be attained except at the expense of the needful. Honor is less rigid than virtue; glory more easily satisfied than honor, because the more a man dazzles by his liberality, the less we dream of asking whether he pays his debts." She is always arriving at truth by way of paradox; she gives us sense under a piquant aspect; she grasps, as it were, an idea by the point. There is something of Seneca in this early manner of her mind — of Seneca with less of fancy and color, but with more real soundness and accuracy. A kind of humor gives emphasis to what she says. She is fond of quoting the philosopher Lichtenberg. Many of these pieces of hers are charming little treatises, which together form a complete whole, rendered coherent by circumstances which she imagines and correspondences which she suggests. Here she can, as they say, create for herself a form. But her talent is not reserved for special occasions. Many of the durable thoughts collected in *Moral Counsels* were discovered in the midst of articles on some silly novel or insipid vaudeville, and extracted thence, having germinated spontaneously, like flowers in the crevice of a wall.¹ These numerous

¹ "The loves of youth need a flavor of surprise, as those of later years need a flavor of habit." (15th Thermidor, year XIII. From the review of a novel entitled, *Julie de Saint-Olmont*.)

"Love, youth, the sweet natural affections, afford quite as many chances of life as of death; quite as many sources of consolation as of affliction. We do not surrender to sorrow so long

views, never conflicting, because always just, which may even be said to have met and coalesced at a certain depth in Mlle. de Meulan's being, constitute, when taken collectively, a view of the world and of society, rather than a philosophical theory of the mind and its laws. A woman who has borne with honor an illustrious name—Mme. de Condorcet, fifteen years the senior of Mlle. de Meulan, and more closely connected than she with the world of the *Décade*—attempted at about this time, in her letters to Cabanis on Sympathy, a strictly philosophic analysis of the various human sentiments. In this essay, which is too little known, it might be possible to detect some points of resemblance to the style of Mlle. de Meulan, as, for example, this: "The mind is like those instruments which overtask and weary the hands that carry without using them." But, in general, their methods are distinct and even contrary. A sort of mania, like that of Helvetius, for universal happiness, an eager confidence in the power of truth, and zeal for its discovery (which Mlle. de Meulan had not yet attained), gave pathos to the calm analysis of Mme. de Condorcet, and circulated through its pages of abstractions, mingling, in many places, an element of sensibility and eloquence all the more affecting because held in check. What

as any other sentiment has power to distract the mind; and he who loses what he loves best will by no means die if he have anything left to love." (12th Prairial, year XII. From the review of a tale by Mme. de Genlis.)

"A woman who has reached the end of youth must not suppose that she has any further concern with passion—not even with vanquishing it. Her strength must henceforth lie in calm, and not in courage." (April 19, 1806.)

an austere charm attaches to the portrait of the benevolent and sympathetic man! And whenever she has to treat of love, how fondly, and yet with what gravity and sadness, does she approach the subject! What hopeless regret, amid all the wisdom of her speculations, is betrayed by the final allusion to *that enchanted cup*. Mme. de Condorcet had received the torch and inherited the passion of the eighteenth century. Mlle. de Meulan had only its tone and turn of mind and certain of its habits of judgment and speech. Passion was to come to her from another source.

It would certainly be a pleasant task, although too long and laborious, to review those of Mme. Guizot's articles which have not been collected, and her many nice and accurate observations on every author she discussed. Although literary criticism was never her forte, she has left traces there which I should regret to see effaced and lost forever. No better or more exhaustive estimate was ever made of Duclos, than hers of August 6, 1810. To Boileau is awarded the superior rank, which is justly his due, in several articles dated Pluviose, year XIII. She was not without a certain intellectual sympathy with Boileau, notwithstanding the predominance in her of the moral over the literary element. Her acquaintance with English literature was marvellous. The poets and philosophers of that nation she had thoroughly mastered, and was herself worthy to be compared with the great critical moralists, Addison and Johnson. In July and August, 1809, I find articles of hers on Collin d'Harleville. She divides the history of his genius into two distinct periods, separated by the Revolution, — the one being marked by success, the other by reverse. In the latter, Collin,

overcome by the spectacle of social chaos, essayed to depict manners, and failed; "for," she says, "it was not society which Collin d'Harleville was destined to portray. The tendency of his mind was rather subjective than objective. He describes what he has felt rather than what he has seen." The name of Collin d'Harleville will keep its place in the history of literature, and he who overlooks Mlle. de Meulan's able estimate, will be in danger of seeing and judging him less fairly than she. At that time, 1806, Leopold Collin was reprinting and publishing a vast number of letters belonging to the seventeenth and early part of the eighteenth centuries, from the pen of Mlle. de Montpensier, Ninon, Mme. de Coulanges, Mlle. de Launay, &c. These writers Mlle. de Meulan discusses like one of themselves, — a sort of tardy contemporary. She says of Mme. des Houlières, "The only fault of her idyls is that of being too determinately idyllic: she puts in wit everywhere, and flowers wherever she can." "The talent of Mme. Cottin is such," she says, "that you cannot criticise her, until the emotions she excites have subsided; and these emotions are very enduring." She says of the style of Mme. de Genlis, that "it is always good, and never better." But along with all this subtlety and acumen, by virtue of which she is the latest heir to Mme. de Lambert, she has her strong qualities. Polemics never terrified her; and the blows which she dealt in her vein of ironical courtesy, were harder than those which the poet attributes to *Herminie*. It delighted her to repeat, over and over again, with an air of smiling malice, the college pedantries of Geoffroy and company, even on the subject of the Latin, in which she

was somewhat versed.”¹ But her most remarkable controversy, and one which is worthy of republication, was that which she carried on with M. de Bonald, in Vendémiaire and Brumaire, in the year XIV. The author of *Primitive Legislation* had set forth, in the *Mercure*, at great length, and after the manner of violent and paradoxical minds, when moved to the support of absolute theses, — the idea that he who is neither a Christian nor a Catholic, must of necessity be an atheist. Mlle. de Meulan, under the guise of “A Disputant,” reviewed the obstinate reasoner with sharp and telling ridicule. “Discussion, monsieur, is a necessity. Without it life had better be short; it would, in fact, be altogether too long. I have found a perfect treasure in your argument against Deism. If I understand you, monsieur, truth is necessarily one of two extremes, because the same proposition cannot have degrees of truth,” &c. An officious partisan of M. Bonald interfered during the quarrel, and addressed several letters to the *Publiciste*, in which he endeavored to soften his friend’s paradox, and also animadverted on the tone of raillery which the disputant had employed. The latter then closes the discussion by a last vigorous letter, which rises to a strain of eloquence. After

¹ Mlle. de Meulan, like several of our distinguished French writers, was related to antiquity only by a Latin turn of mind. She had something in common with Seneca; that is to say, she touched antiquity through the most modern of the ancients. In an article in the *Archives Littéraires* (vol. iii. page 325), she observes, “The ancients frequently said ‘swift as light,’ but, if I mistake not, ‘swift as thought’ is of modern origin.” On this particular point she was mistaken, as Boissonade (page 318 of his *Aristænete*) and Dugas-Montbel (in his observations on the fifteenth book of the *Iliad*) have shown by repeated instances.

quoting this remark of an ancient writer, that "an idea which cannot stand the test of ridicule is at least suspicious," after citing Pascal on Grace, Boileau on the Love of God, and M. de La Harpe himself making merry over the Theophilanthropists, Mlle. de Meulan retorts upon her adversaries their reproach of danger to be apprehended to the cause of religion from this too animated party strife. "You discuss in the newspapers what you do not want discussed after the manner of newspapers. You introduce the subject of religion. May not others do the same? A man who is a reproach to literature constitutes himself the guardian of religion, and the friends of religion applaud! She is abandoned to such hands as may deign to undertake her service, and considered only too fortunate in obtaining defenders at all! No, monsieur, you must reserve yourself for discussions not intended for the public, for more inviolable asylums, and a less corruptible audience," — and so on, to the end of the letter. Thus combat suited her spirit well; she was born for fiery arguments, and the earnest pursuit of truth.

Much was, of course, said, in the world, of the articles of Mlle. de Meulan, and they were variously regarded. Talents so remarkable, a pen so free in the treatment of every subject, do not invariably awaken a spirit of sincere good will. It was impossible to refuse respect to the author, and society fell back on the question of personal decorum. Those "friends in misfortune," which she has hit off so fairly, — those "Job's comforters," always the same, — bemoaned aloud the necessity which reduced a woman of her birth to the writing of newspaper articles, and particularly of dramatic criticism. Disgusted with this venomous com-

passion, she replied to it nobly, by her Letter of a Female Journalist to a Friend, published December 18, 1807. "My articles are censured, are they, my friend? That, of course, is to their credit; but you tell me the censure extends to me personally, — to the stand I have taken as contributor to a journal, and especially as a critic of theatrical novelties. I am reproached, therefore, with being a woman, not surely with being a journalist, for those of my censors who know me know very well why I am that. But do they not fear that they may have wherewith to reproach themselves, if, by words lightly uttered, they succeed in destroying, or, at least, in rendering more difficult of exercise, the courage found requisite for the sacrifice to what I considered a duty, of the conventionalities which my education and habits had taught me to respect. I know them, my friend, and so do you, — these conventionalities which make the rôle of a journalist the very oddest for a woman to choose, — if, indeed, it ever were adopted from choice. It cannot, I assure you, appear as ridiculous to these friends of yours as to me, for they have never seen it so near. If they knew, as well as I, the grave interests at stake, the important considerations to be weighed, the absurd griefs to be consoled, and the still more absurd homage to be accepted; the buzz of petty passions, whose noise invades a woman's very solitude; and if they could see, amid all this, a work to be done without charm for the mind, or indemnification for the vanity, then they might say what they thought, and think, if they pleased, that I had undertaken this work for my own pleasure. But let them not attempt to pity me, for that would be as unreasonable as to blame.

‘Ce que j’ai fait, Abner, j’ai cru le devoir faire.’¹

“I think so still, and I see no reason why I should now distress myself about annoyances which I foresaw without trepidation. You know how gladly and hopefully I submitted to these; you saw me face them with something of pride, perhaps, when I formed the resolution whose sole merit lay in these annoyances. Circumstances have not changed since then, and why should my feelings?” Here is a woman wholesomely penetrated with the ideas of duty and of work, such as regenerated society imperatively demands; and such Mme. Guizot always remained. Issuing from the idle and polished *salons* of the eighteenth century, she becomes a shining example of vigorous, intellectual, efficient womanhood, in the first rank of the middle class.

During her long connection with the *Publiciste* there occurred an incident, often related, and almost romantic in its character, — as much so as is possible, at least, between persons of intelligence and circumspection, — and whose influence upon the destiny of Mlle. de Meulan was supreme. In the month of March, 1807, under the pressure of fresh domestic misfortunes, and with health greatly impaired, she had resolved to suspend her labors for a time, when a letter arrived containing the offer of articles which the writer would attempt to render worthy of her, as long as her own should be interrupted. The author of this anonymous letter, and of the articles, which, after some slight hesitation, she accepted, was M. Guizot. Very young, and still obscure, he had heard M. Suard speak of

¹ I have done what I thought it my duty to do.

Mlle. de Meulan and her situation, and he addressed her. We find, therefore, in the *Publiciste* for the ensuing months, certain miscellaneous, dramatic, and literary criticisms signed F. This singular circumstance came presently to constitute a stronger bond between these two eminent minds than the inequality of their ages, and the want of harmony, even, in their opinions, would, probably, else have allowed. M. Guizot brought with him into the world of letters decided political and religious convictions, which had still something of the absolute rigor of youth. Inimical to the eighteenth century and its scepticism, rather than to the Revolution, whose results, with his own interpretations and modifications, he accepted, he encountered in Mlle. de Meulan precisely the opposite temper. The latter, moreover, held rather, as we have seen, to the idea that "time alone brings men to just and right views, but that justice and right have rarely convinced any one." She used also to say, "Reason, unhappily, is only for reasonable people." The young man, fresh from Nismes and Geneva, and guarding, with Calvinistic fervor, his faith in unitarian Christianity and a sort of enthusiastic rationalism, felt the duty and the necessity of pursuing some definite end,—of convincing others and urging them towards the same,—of testifying before the world to the idea that was active and dominant in himself. In a word, when he and Mlle. de Meulan met at a great intellectual altitude, it was the encounter of mental tendencies of an opposite, not to say hostile, origin. True it is, that during her years of long and serious labor, Mlle. de Meulan had learned a more sincere devotion to truth; she had learned to believe in its utility,

to defend it, to agonize for it, indirectly at least, by attacking every form of error, and also to bring each act of her austere life under the already religious empire of her reason and her will. Yet it was not the least of M. Guizot's intellectual triumphs to conquer and warm up by degrees to his own convictions and hopes—to regenerate, in short, by union with himself—that other and maturer mind, to which the scope of M. Suard had long sufficed, and which seemed to have attained the natural limit of its growth in a striking originality.

For the rest, when we see what he gave, we can imagine what he must have received. A mind as forcible as Mlle. de Meulan's is not vanquished and occupied save by one who can modify and accommodate his own at many points. In these cases of reciprocal action, each of the actors, in turn, seems to have triumphed, according as we examine the other. And here, while retaining the prevailing influence, the victorious spirit must have received, and that consciously, its own indispensable share in the mitigation of its intolerance, and in a precocious knowledge of the world, and of the manipulation of society and men.

Their marriage did not take place until April, 1812. And now a new era—that in which she is best known—begins for Mme. Guizot. The glow of affection heightened in her the ardor of conviction; and this twofold fire, warming rather than shining, was to sustain and animate to the end her years of sober happiness. We have no longer to do with a moralist of the expiring eighteenth century, but with a writer of the new and busy age; an assiduous and careful mother, who has felt sorrow, and is forming men; with a righteous

philosopher intent upon proving the harmony, in every order of creation, between right and duty, faith and inquiry, liberty and law. Her style becomes less vivacious than in the past, less paradoxical and incisive, and loses its tone of light and reckless irony. A constant feeling for the genuine, the true, the right, controls and directs, at all points, the mere artistic sense. Her principles are now fixed and high; her aim, henceforth, a practical one. Her first attempt in this direction was made after her marriage, and consisted of several articles, tales, and dialogues, inserted in the *Educational Review*, a compilation by M. Guizot, whose publication was interrupted by the events of 1814. She also published at about the same time a volume of juvenile stories, — the first of her works, — to which, urged by a sense of moral responsibility, she attached her name. This line of labor, which had naturally been suspended during the early years of her husband's political career, she resumed in 1821, being moved thereto both by her own zeal for doing good, and by their honorable domestic necessities. She produced, successively, *Ralph and Victor*, or the *Young Student*, in 1821, the *New Tales* in 1823, and *Familiar Letters on Education* in 1826, which last is her true monument. A *Family* did not appear till 1828, after the author's death. In all these works, the *Familiar Letters* excepted, which must be considered by themselves, her excellent sense takes on the form of happily conceived fiction, of probable and interesting incident, where the author never intrudes herself. She who, at twenty-five, had assumed the airs of a *person of uncertain age*, or even a *douairière du Marais*, enters no less successfully, as she grows older, into the little

world of children from ten to fourteen, and constantly brings home to them some wholesome evangelical moral, which she adapts to their comprehension without detracting from its dignity. "A fond and favorite idea of hers," says the preface to *A Family*, "was, that the same moral education can and ought to be given to all ranks; that, under the sway of the most various external circumstances, in good or bad fortune, whether the lot be obscure or distinguished, uneventful or stormy, man may attain—there may be induced in the child an inner development almost identical—the same integrity, the same delicacy, the same refinement of thought and feeling; that the human soul, in short, bears within something which renders it equal to all the chances and changes of human condition; and that all we have to do is to reveal to itself the secret of its strength, and teach the true method of its employment. And how was Mme. Guizot, with her satirical reason, her somewhat scornful habits of thought, led so swiftly and surely to this, the plenary idea of genuine human democracy? Whence came to her the singular and vivid inspiration of all her subsequent works? She had become a mother. Her filial piety had been of the warmest. Her maternal love, as with all who marry late, was transcendent, clinging with unparalleled tenacity to the son whom she had never hoped to see, and upon whom, to use the father's happy expression, she has left her perfect impress.¹ Her treatises on education were, therefore, in her own eyes, an act of maternal affection and duty. In the preface to the *Familiar Letters* she grows eloquent about what she calls this

¹ He has since been snatched away in the flower of his youth.

precious interest. Before she had a child of her own she had labored and written for the support of her mother,—nothing more. She had doubted the efficiency of truth and reason in the world. She beheld absurdity, stupidity, and wrong, and she was not very hopeful. But once a mother, she felt the necessity of believing in a better future and a perfectible humanity,—in the virtue of those generations that would be contemporary with her child. She placed little dependence upon man, and saw no way to ameliorate his condition save by influencing his childhood—a work which she undertook without delay. Persons of thirty, with some knowledge of the world and of life, if they are neither fathers nor mothers, and have not the pure and simple faith of the catechism, are often sorely embarrassed in the presence of childhood. What shall be said to this smiling, charming being, with the evident germ of future faults? How is he to be gradually initiated into life? How enlightened and not saddened; how left happy and not deceived? The man of sensibility will follow the example of the poet Gray, who, on revisiting Eton College, and seeing the merry boys at play, exclaims, after a complacent description of their gambols,—

“ Alas! regardless of their doom,

The little victims play! —

No sense have they of ills to come,

Nor care beyond to-day;

Yet see how all around ’em wait

The ministers of human fate,

And black misfortune’s baleful train!

Ah, show them where in ambush stand,

To seize their prey, the murderous band!

Ah, tell them they are men.

- “ These shall the fury passions tear,
The vultures of the mind, —
Disdainful Anger, pallid Fear,
And Shame, that skulks behind;
Or pining Love shall waste their youth,
Or Jealousy, with rankling tooth,
That inly gnaws the secret heart!
And Envy wan, and faded Care,
Grim-visaged, comfortless Despair,
And Sorrow’s piercing dart.
- “ To each his sufferings; all are men
Condemned alike to groan,
The tender for another’s pain,
Th’ unfeeling for his own.
Yet, ah, why should they know their fate,
Since Sorrow never comes too late,
And Happiness too swiftly flies?
Thought would destroy their paradise.
No more; where ignorance is bliss
’Tis folly to be wise.”

But when one is not a sensitive and melancholy bachelor, like Gray, but a father, or, still more, a mother, these vague fears, and this disconsolate quietism, cease to satisfy. We become more interested in vigilance, and more accessible to hope. We realize that many of those dread shadows, with which imagination peoples the distance, will vanish one by one, as our travellers advance. Mme. Guizot, whose turn of mind was naturally and in all respects the opposite of vague and dreamy, — who hated everything aimless and phantasmal, — felt all the anxieties which accompany maternity, and made a direct attack upon the difficulty by which she was confronted. Hitherto, she had believed man to be incorrigible, and rationality a happy accident, at most, a special gift. She had written, with clever

raillery, on the Inutility of Good Reasons. She now desired to atone for her previous prejudice, by going to the root of the matter, and approaching humanity on its only sensitive and amenable side.—that of childhood. The whole remnant of her intellectual life was devoted to the development and application of this salutary idea.

Mlle. de Meulan had frequently had occasion to broach her ideas on the subject of education. In 1802, in an article called forth by Fénelon's little treatise, she says, "Educational precepts have always seemed to me the least reliable things in the world. Principles must be so variously applied, and rules are subject to so many exceptions, that a treatise of this kind cannot be too short, because it can neither be sufficiently long nor sufficiently comprehensive to include every individual case." Under the form of Letters of a Mother to a Son-in-law (Thermidor, year XII.), she had discussed with varied ability the question of public education for women, taking the negative side, displaying extreme good sense as well as much wit, or rather pungency, and her own most free and easy style of composition. How altered is her tone, when in the first of the Familiar Letters, Mme. de Attilly opens her heart,— "overflowing," as she says, "with tender concern for her children!" Touches of sarcasm are not wanting here and there, as in the description of "Uncle de Revey," who, when he seated himself to his whist, always declared it to be *improving*. In the main, however, the work is entirely serious, which does not preclude an extraordinary degree of subtilty upon many points. One should have authority and experience, and his own ideas on the subject under discussion should be formed before he is fitted to pass judgment on a treatise like this,

whose chief importance lies in the utility and feasibility of its suggestions. "The hour of political reform is also that of educational schemes," says Mme. de Rémusat, a gifted and generous woman, who has paid, after a charming fashion, her own debt of service to the world. In fact, there has been since *Emile* no lack of educational theories, and their number has redoubled in these latter days; or rather the special outcry against the education and the condition of women has been renewed with clamorous insistence. Amid so many vain declamations, in which there figure at intervals some considerable difficulties and some real grievances, Mme. Guizot's book, which embraces the whole subject of education, masculine as well as feminine, offers a kind of honest and manly compromise between old ideas and modern progress. What I have called "a compromise," was, to her mind, nothing more nor less than truth adapted to the needs of humanity, but resting on an impregnable basis. The twelfth and thirteenth letters, which are marked by great philosophic beauty, set forth those principles of reason and conscience upon which she founds the idea of duty, and show that her chief care is to suggest, and make gradually clear to the child's mind, the notion of authority, that he may learn early and freely, and as far as in him lies, to direct his own young will thereby. Early to diffuse about the growing mind a moral atmosphere, to give it for a guide the love of right, to make the child as soon as possible a conscientious individual, — this is her earnest aim, and despite conflicting prejudices, we must concede, as we listen to her, that she has discovered and indicated the true means of success. It is at least certain that in the majority of instances, when the child is, as they say, well born, — when there

does not lurk within him any faculty so eccentric, or temper so obstinate, as utterly to baffle calculation, — a good result must follow such care as she enjoins. For the rest, Mme. Guizot, whose arguments are founded on absolute fact, foresees and freely admits that there may be cases for which her system will not suffice. “I see more and more clearly each day,” says Mme. d’Attilly, “that youth is, of all ages, the one which is least explicable by childhood. The character seems then to be swayed by an independent influence, strength to resist which we may indeed supply, but with no previous conception of how that strength will have to be employed. Mme. Guizot alludes in one place to a dictum of Mrs. Hannah More about the total depravity of childhood, and combats it. On this point, let it be observed, Mme. Guizot is decidedly of the present century — of the thorough and indomitable school of experimental philosophy. She will allow no mysterious and irrational element in education. Here is her essential point of difference with Mme. Necker de Saussure, that other excellent author, with many of whose views she coincides, as Mme. Necker herself, in her second volume, is pleased repeatedly to remark. She occupies a sort of mean between Jean Jacques and Mme. Necker, being at the same time practical, which Jean Jacques is not, and reasonable, which Mme. Necker does not think it enough to be. In the second volume, the forty-ninth and fiftieth letters, with those that immediately follow, discuss exhaustively, and with admirable moderation, the whole delicate and embarrassing question of the religious education required by children. If her views do not meet and satisfy the ideas of those who adhere firmly to pure faith and rigorous traditions, she has the advantage of answering

and providing for all the other more or less complex requirements and situations likely to be encountered in society, and also of proposing an attainable result both to Mme. Mallard, and Mme. de Lassay. Somewhere in the discussion the name and authority of Turgot are invoked, and we are made to feel that the author's preferences, though modified and extended, are still retrospective, and cling to the 18th century. Mme. Guizot's book will stand next to *Emile*, marking the difference, in this particular direction, between the bold guesses of genius, and the sound, temperate, rectified reasoning of our own day; just as, in politics, M. de Tocqueville's Democracy is an advance upon the *Contrat Social*. Invaluable for consultation to those who would, by previous training, prepare strong men for our painful modern society, this work also contains pages of morality, the finest in their manner of exposition, and, saving a few of M. Jouffroy's, the most earnest and the most convincing with which the doctrines of spiritualistic rationalism have inspired any philosopher of our age.

What share, apart from her own personal labors, had Mme. Guizot in those of her husband, — in all those valuable accessory publications by which he accompanied his main historical work, — and in which, beginning with the translation of Gibbon, she must have been his principal auxiliary? Let it suffice us to know that she had espoused all his interests, — his studious labors as well as his convictions, — and let us not attempt to discover what she preferred to conceal. Her happiness was great. Her sensibility, which grew with her years (refined privilege of a virtuous life), caused her to cling to that happiness more and more tenderly — I had almost said regretfully — as time went by. This

sensibility, whereof she had so deliberately declared in youth,—sensibility spares us more suffering than it brings, for it removes at one stroke the pains of egotism, vanity, ennui, and inertia,—this sensibility, to which she owed so much pure delight, did its spring within her never fail? Did not her soul, as she neared the end,—even hers, strong and calm reasoner that she was,—grow sorrowful? Her failing health amid a life so congenial, so virtuous, so affectionate; the great disparity in age between her husband and herself; her secret yearnings; her one acute presentiment that husband and child would yet be made happy by another than herself,—these things doubtless mingled with her last years more of passion and pathos than she would ever have dared anticipate in her youth. The exquisite rejuvenation in her impressions of all things was revealed in a thousand different ways. With the exception of a tour in Languedoc and the South, where M. Guizot had taken her in 1814, she had never travelled much. She had scarcely seen the country, much less resided there; but she enjoyed it in her last summers as only those who have been forced to live by wax lights enjoy verdure and the fields. The tiniest tree in Passy or in the Bois de Boulogne gave her a new and refreshing emotion.

Yet she never described nature. Her care was less to depict what she felt than to express what she thought. She did not love art supremely. She looked rather to the substance than to the form, and preferred modern thought to antique beauty. Her ingenious, and perhaps too just, idea was, that the emotional element cannot predominate in a work of art without being withdrawn from the life of the artist. In one of her pieces, dated July 17, 1810, I read, "Our torch is lighted at

the flames of sentiment," says the poet in *La Métromanie*; and I suppose that sensibility may in fact be regarded as the aliment of poesy, but only when it is not otherwise employed, and when, being entirely at the poet's command, it serves to stimulate without absorbing his imagination. It is necessary, no doubt, that a poet should be impressible, but I do not know that it is desirable for him to be deeply moved; and she continues refuting, or rather interpreting, Boileau's verses on the elegy. This idea that there is a species of illusion, or even of deception, inherent in art, did not prevent her being extraordinarily moved, towards the close of her life, by certain books and dramatic representations, — moved even beyond the point of enjoyment, — so that the effect of her agitation was more than she could bear. Herself a simple, practical person who had known sorrow, she did not readily yield to any artificial grief, neither could she submit to any restraint, or accept any consolation in the region of the ideal. M. de Rémusat has adduced the following pathetic avowal made by her in 1821: "The effect of a work of art should be unimpaired by any association with the actual; for the moment it seems real, the impression produced is painful, and soon becomes intolerable. This is why I cannot endure on the stage, or in poems or novels, under the name of Tancred, or Zaïre, or Othello, or Delphine, the spectacle of great and fatal anguish of spirit. As far as joy and sorrow are concerned, my own life has been so full, so intense, that I cannot explore its depths, save with a trembling hand. With me the actual pierces through all the enveloping veils of art. My imagination once stimulated, I realize the whole at a flash. It is long, however, since the music in Agnes has produced upon me the ordinary effect. I never

could bear the finale of *Romeo and Juliet*: only that of Agnes draws tears without rending my heart." Was it, then, by virtue of a rare sympathy, a kind of predilection, that she undertook, at the very last, to treat that story of Abelard and Heloise, where asceticism is crossed and penetrated by passion, and the accomplished abbess often breathes the woes of Sappho in the words of Seneca? This earnest effort of her pen, eminently successful in its completed half, was interrupted by her death.

But if, as Mme. Guizot's sensibilities grew more refined, they acquired a kind of pensive cast, her deepening religious experience was disturbed by none of those anxieties with which religion is too often associated in serious and sensitive minds. Born a Catholic, early tainted with the indifferentism which she inhaled in the very atmosphere of the time, restored after doubts which had never been systematically hostile to a fervent Christian deism, a genuine piety, she rested here, and was at peace. She had no oppressive consciousness of the unfathomable depths of grace and salvation opened along her path. She simply trusted. Prayer, as an interview with a kind and omnipresent Being, strengthened and consoled her. One day, shortly after her return from Plombières, where she had vainly sought some comfort from the conversation of those about her, and had meditated long and deeply on the question whether individuality outlasts death, or the soul is absorbed in the Supreme Being, she suddenly revived from her extreme prostration, and in a voice that gathered strength by degrees, she reviewed the various opinions, and declared her clear and confident conviction of the continuance of the soul's personality in the bosom of God. On the 1st of August, 1827,

at ten o'clock in the morning, her lingering illness drew near its close. She had begged her husband to read her something good, and he had read a letter of Fénelon's to an invalid, and then passed to a sermon of Bossuet on the immortality of the soul. While he was reading, she passed away. She was buried, agreeably to her own desire, with the rites of the Reformed Church, to which her husband belonged, and whose funeral service did not contradict her own simple creed. Truthful to the end, she would have nothing factitious and conventional, nothing inconsistent with her most secret thoughts, even in those last ceremonies which follow death.

She took a lively pleasure in conversation, loving it, not as an occasion for shining, but as a means of mental stimulus and exercise. Her manner may have seemed slightly brusque at first. Her *inquisitive reason*, as she somewhere says, searched the depths of every subject. But as her interest grew, her ideas multiplied, and, without at all intending it, she exercised a powerful influence. What more can we, who had not the honor of her personal acquaintance, say of this gifted, sagacious, exemplary, and virtuous woman, who has had no superior, in our generation, save Mme. de Staël, and whom even she did not excel as a thinker, but only in a few special gifts? The sentiment which she inspires is such as can only be expressed in terms of respectful admiration — such that it seems almost a sin against one who was always intent upon being, rather than seeming, to pronounce on her behalf the words *future* and *glory*.

May 15, 1836.

